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TO MENELEK IN A MOTOR-CAR

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BY

CLIFFORD HALLÉ

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HERBERT WELD-BLUNDELL, B.Litt. (Oxon.), F.R.G.S.

WITH 72 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS AND A MAP, BY B. BENTLEY

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY DESIRE OF

BEDE J. F. BENTLEY

TO HIS GOOD AND FAITHFUL FRIEND

AND MECHANICIAN

REGINALD G. WELLS

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In the ordinary course of events, a preface is inserted in a book in order that the reader may have the satisfaction of beginning by a good long skip. No doubt the usual skip will be made, but in this case it will not be a long one, for I only propose to say a few words of pleading in extenuation of sentence, by explaining how the following pages came to be written.

Bede Bentley and I happened to be sharing the same house and both to be rather run down in health, so that a pipe and a yarn after dinner was the utmost exertion that we were capable of for some time.

I seemed to have always been a generation in front of Bentley, for the boys of my generation were leaving the various Catholic schools when he went to Beaumont. I went to Africa while Umbandine and Lobengula and Paul Kruger were very much alive, and before railways were thought of in the Transvaal, or Chartered Companies even hinted at. Bentley went there to assist in removing Paul Kruger, and found many changes, for Mashonaland and the Matabele country of my knowledge had disappeared, and in their place Rhodesia had appeared. It was the same thing with India and other parts of the world, always ten years or so of change; and ten years in new countries is equal often to a few centuries in old.

I had never been either to Somaliland or Abyssinia, and I grew much interested in his trip, which from explanatory comparisons with parts of Africa that I knew well I was able to understand.

I began to know Wells and George and Bully intimately, and it struck me that the trip altogether was a very notable

achievement, and as such might interest a larger public than one solitary sick man over a pipe.

Bentley shied altogether at attempting to write down what I gradually dragged out in words; perhaps he was wise. At any rate, let what literary failures there may be be put down to me, in my endeavour to retell as nearly as possible the idea that I gathered of the trip and the characters of those who took part in it.

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN, during the campaign of 1868, the British soldier reached the top of the Abyssinian Plateau, and viewed the scene of tumbled peaks, wall-sided chasms, and tower-like cliffs that Nature has disposed there to keep off foreign invaders, he remarked in disgust rather than in artistic admiration, "Why, they told us we would get to a table-land after this 'ere scramble." "So it is a table-land," replied his mate, "only it's upside down, and there are the legs in the air." Now it is obvious to anyone that a region of this nature, eight thousand feet almost sheer from a burning plain, itself a pathless, almost waterless waste of scrub, deep sand, alternating with mountains of loose boulders, would be just the place to take a modern motor-car, a machine created solely for progression on roads that only the most modern engineering and ingenuity have succeeded in making sufficiently perfect to suit such delicate mechanism. To those who fail to see the obviousness of the desire to take a motor through such an experience, I can only say they will probably also fail to appreciate a great many laudable attempts to prevent modern life stagnating with too monotonous common-sense, and to provide journalists, cinematographers, photographers, and above all, doctors and undertakers (especially the latter, a profession on which modern hygienic science threatens to make such serious inroads), with the means of making a living.

It must not, however, be assumed that Mr. Bentley was inspired solely by the desire to achieve the almost impossible with a motor-car; there was also the rational and attractive prospect of presenting it to the Emperor Menelek, who, if he is not, as his tradition claims, a direct descendant of King Solomon, is a man possessed with a quite remarkable passion for machinery, and gifted with intelligence to take pains to study and understand it. Menelek, as everyone knows, is the second of that name, the first Menelek being said to be the otherwise unreported consequence of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to the Wise Man of the East. One is tempted to suspect a reversion to his distant ancestor, for it may be pretty well assumed that a taste for mechanism and the capacity to understand it has probably never been characteristic of any Abyssinian King since it was exhibited in the person of King Solomon.

I have been told by those who knew the Emperor well that if he had ever been able to travel to England, which had been always one of his cherished ambitions, the one thing that would have absorbed his interest and delighted him beyond all modern civilization could have shown him would have been the monster workshops and wonders of latter-day machinery. Though I had never to show anything more mysterious than what was then a new straight-pull Ross rifle, it was a pleasure to see him at once grasp the points of its advantage and ask technical questions about its capabilities. There is a good story told me by one of his ministers, about a field-gun presented by a foreign Government. Though of quite an out-of-date pattern, they hoped it would impress the unsophisticated mind. The diplomat at Adis Ababa explained the movements as for the benefit of an infant, and showed with a patronizing air how you pulled a cord and

it went bang. The Emperor coolly made a few passing criticisms, comparing it with the very latest types of quick-firers, and begged the minister to thank his Government for what would not be of much use to him, but might amuse his grandchildren.

Mr. Bentley's experience with the Black Isa Somalis and their still more ruffianly neighbours the Danakils was quite an extra dish in the entertainment, that few adventurous spirits who are acquainted with these bloodthirsty savages would care to have thrown in. Even excursion agents who, according to current reports, will run a caravan journey in the wilds, with, or without, a night attack by Bedouins, would hesitate at a contract dealing with these rascals. Mr. Bentley, when the rescue party came up after those weeks of hideous suspense, must have felt beyond the usual "I breathe again" relief, the feeling of exultation of one who has to write an account of his adventures, and got something really thrilling to put in it. I can remember a similar feeling in a milder adventure, when four of us were swamped in a racing boat in the wide stretch of the Seine estuary in a gale—after hanging on the keel (it had mercifully turned over with some air under it) for three-quarters of an hour, without any prospect of ever getting to shore, as we were hauled out, numbed and exhausted, by a rescuing ferryman—"what a capital thing for the book," we exclaimed through our chattering teeth.

In extenuation of the performances of the natives, it must be observed that their occasionally incomprehensible acts of hostility and deplorable lack of humour, *e.g.*, in taking the escapades of two Englishmen and a bulldog with a most inappropriate machine as a serious phenomenon, are not always to be referred to their incorrigible wickedness—it

has been known, though of course no one could hint at such a thing in this instance, that the long arm of what is called diplomacy has been responsible for outrages otherwise hard to explain. The untutored savage sometimes has had a careful schooling in the programme. I can bear witness to this myself, though in my case the stage-manager—a polite Turkish Pasha—was late with the instructions, and I got through too soon to play " leading victim," and so upset the arrangements for the most telling scene in the performance.

Mr. Bentley can be congratulated on his energy and courage, which made him the successful pioneer of the motor-car in Abyssinia, and equally on his luck in getting there while the Emperor was still in the enjoyment of vigour and health to take pleasure in a drive in the machine of mysterious wonder. The life of excitement and strenuous work, of hairbreadth escapes (he had been a prisoner of that homicidal maniac, King Theodore), had begun to tell upon him at the age of sixty-eight or so, and he is now a half-animated, paralysed image of what was once one of the most energetic and hardworking men that ever tried to do the work of every office in his kingdom, from the throne, including the business of principal merchant and money-lender. It is said that the Empress is his partner in the latter, not always lucrative, occupation.

It has even been hinted that the simulacrum wrapped in bandages is a counterfeit presentment by one of his officers, and that the Emperor has already been dead a long time. At any rate, the Government, nominally a regency for the young Emperor Lej Iasu (son of Joshua), a youth of about seventeen, is of a somewhat provisional and irresponsible character, a fact that militates strongly against any efforts of Europeans to develop the resources of the country, or even

carry on trade outside the routine of ordinary supply, which is of small dimensions. The preposterous offers of irresponsible and entirely impecunious Levantines have always made it difficult for serious capitalists to make their more sober and less extravagant proposals attractive to people whose ideas of security and rate of return are somewhat of the Arabian Nights order. The Emperor and his consort have suffered sometimes severely from the inability to see that a loan to an almost penniless Greek, with an equally penniless one as guarantor, 120 per cent. had not much gold about it, though it might glitter. The average level, too, of commercial and other sorts of honesty is not quixotically high, it must be confessed. The beauties of the Nonconformist conscience would leave an Abyssinian cold.

It is only fair to warn the reader of this book against accepting the impression that this is only an account of a wild adventure or cut-the-record competition to provide advertisement or copy for a thrilling book. Mr. Bentley has done much more than this. Though he may not have laid the foundation of a brisk motor-car trade among people whose country is only passable for mules, and whose personal luxuries do not include a pair of boots, and whose income, even among the upper ten, would not be called a living wage by a railway striker in England, he has impressed a very acute people with the energy and enterprise of Englishmen, and the ingenuity and strength of their machinery. Those that come after him to seek opportunities for developing the country or constructing works will find their prestige enhanced by the pluck and endurance of a journey of this sort. A tradition soon gathers round any performance that impresses the imagination of such a people; sometimes, indeed, in a direction that would escape the observer of the

obvious only. The campaign of '68 against Theodore is not only remembered by its important results—they are too accustomed to centuries of fighting; but what has been handed down as something wonderful about the invasion is the fact that the British Army, passing victoriously through a country practically conquered, *paid* for such supplies, &c., that they took. The honesty of Englishmen was established for all time.

HERBERT WELD-BLUNDELL.

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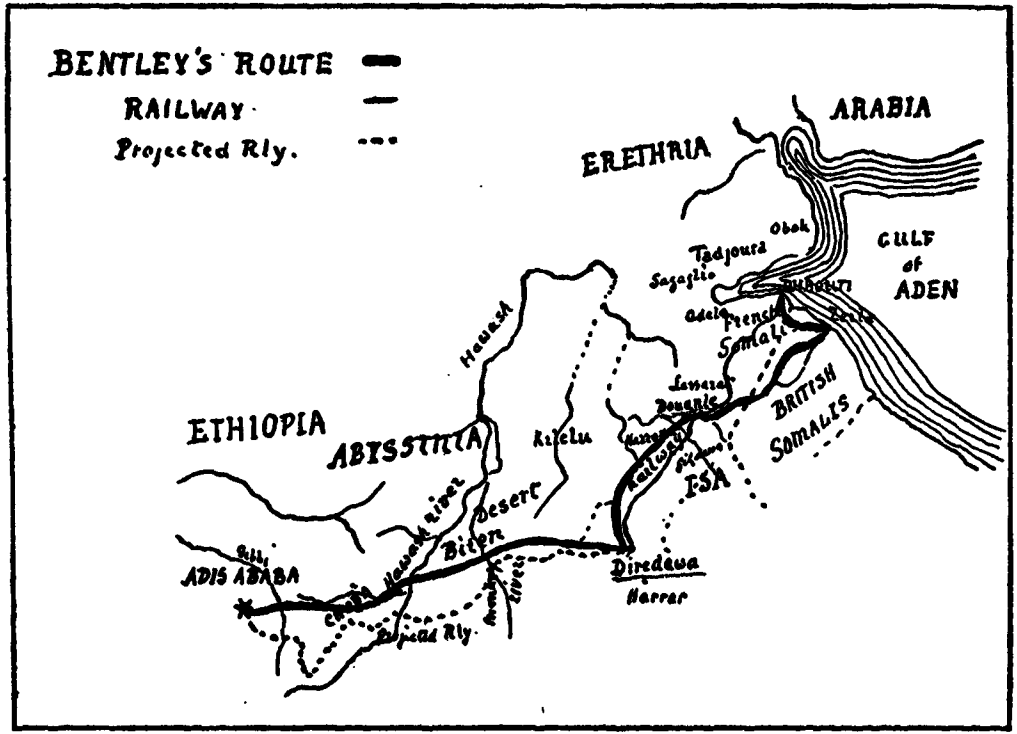

BENTLEY'S ROUTE
RAILWAY
Projected Rly.
ARABIA
ERETHRIA
Tadjoura
Obok
Sagaglio
GULF of ADEN
Adele
French Somali
Zeila
Lamera
Dougnic
BRITISH SOMALIS
ETHIOPIA
ABYSSINIA
Hawash
Kifelu
Hawash river
Desert
Biffen
ADIS ABABA
Dire Dawa
Harrar
Rly. Projected Rly.

TO MENELEK IN A MOTOR-CAR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Bentley's previous record—Inception of the idea of the trip and preparations—Wells—The start—The passenger—Across France—The dock strike—Off at last.

AT the end of April, in the year 1907, Bede Bentley arrived home in England after an absence of several years, during which time he had served throughout the South African war, had taken part in two expeditions in Somaliland, between which he returned to Central Africa, trading and exploring, found his way to Egypt and worked on the Nile irrigation works; then, at the request of a newspaper, went as special correspondent to inquire into the system of trading on the West coast; and, finally, after a little experience of stock farming in Australia, and a couple of visits to India, felt the necessity of a rest and the recuperating effect of a voyage home, as, of several wounds, one in particular was causing him considerable pain and annoyance.

The result of the voyage was beneficial, and he arrived home with the desire to be off again hard

within him. When in Somaliland he had heard that the Emperor Menelek of Abyssinia was much interested in the stories he had heard of motor-cars and their doings, and was anxious to possess one. It was no doubt possible to convey a car to the capital Adis Ababa in the same manner that the traction engines, which may be seen on the roads surrounding the capital, reached their destination, but this mode of transport did not appeal to Bentley. His idea was that it would be a fine demonstration of what a car was capable of, if it were driven on its own wheels from London to Adis Ababa, wherever land was available.

Those of his friends, who knew the country he proposed to traverse and to whom he spoke of his project, frankly expressed their opinion that such a feat was impossible; but Bentley felt that he knew the country as well as they did, and was of a different opinion.

He approached Mr. Siddeley, at that time the general manager of the Wolseley Tool and Motor Manufacturing Company, who approved of the project, and Bentley went down to the works and selected a car, and then proceeded to make the necessary preparations for the journey.

Stores and provisions had to be purchased and shipped off to Marseilles, there to await his arrival on the car. Foreign editors of newspapers had to be interviewed, for, naturally, as soon as it began to be bruited about that such an attempt was about to

be made, the press was greatly interested, and the *Daily Mail*, especially, furnished Bentley with an introduction to their correspondent in the parts that he was about to visit, Mr. Vorperian, who, they assured him, would render him every assistance in his power—a promise that was afterwards fully realized. Arrangements were duly made for chronicling the progress of the trip, and then Bentley had to look around for a mechanic-companion.

There is no lack of chauffeur-mechanics in London; chauffeurs brave; chauffeurs cool under the thousand chances of the road, where nerve makes just the difference between destruction and safety; chauffeurs sober; chauffeurs willing; chauffeurs uncomplaining under worry and heart-breaking mishaps; but to find one who combined all these qualities, and was at the same time clever with his hands to the extent of not only being able to effect road repairs with the necessary appliances, but able to devise the appliances themselves out of totally unaccustomed material, that was no easy task; nor was the probability very great of inducing such a paragon, when found, to view the prospects of such a trip with the same enthusiasm as he felt himself.

Since his arrival home Bentley had spent most of his time on the road, and, with a view to possibly employing them on his trip, had paid particular attention to any novelties that were in course of trial. In this manner he was able to observe the

characteristics of a good many chauffeurs, especially of one whom he had employed on several occasions to drive his own car, when he wished to be able to give his undivided attention to any of the said novelties that he might at the time be observing.

Gradually it dawned upon him that this was the man he was looking for, and that, as far as he could judge from his behaviour under the petty trials so freely encountered on the road, in those days more frequently than now, in greater trials he would not be found wanting.

So one day, when they were driving together, Bentley said, suddenly and without any preparation or introductory remarks: "Wells"—for that was the chauffeur's name—"would you care to go with me to Abyssinia next week?" The reply of Wells was illustrative of his goodwill, if not of his geographical knowledge: "Yes, sir. Where's that, sir?"

On the way home Bentley discoursed freely on the dangers and hardships that they might look forward to—the scorching heat, the everlasting sand, the want of water; he described the nature of the Somaliland scrub, and, to finish up, quoted the words of a well-known African traveller, which had imprinted themselves in his memory as being so true to his own personal knowledge: 'Here is bad food always, often none at all, a miserable diet at the best, no stimulant, incessant toil and worry, intense discomfort, relaxed muscles, weariness amount-

ing to fainting, and, to cap all, dreadful racking fevers, urging one to curse the day one ever thought of Africa."

Wells listened in silence, the while he attended to his driving, and when Bentley had finished, after a reflective pause, remarked: "Sounds as though the gentleman had had some, sir!—I'll just step over and let the missus know that I'm going, if you can spare me for the night."

Up to that moment Bentley had been unaware that Wells was a married man, or he probably would not have made the suggestion; but having made it, and not having minimized the risks in any way, he felt that the rest was a matter for Mr. and Mrs. Wells to settle between them. From Wells's cryptic utterances it was evident that he had made up his mind to go, and, having once made up his mind, was not to be put off by the prospect of any of the little annoyances that Bentley had been detailing for his benefit.

What occurred at the interview with Mrs. Wells never transpired, for Wells was not talkative; but he turned up in the morning, cheerful and respectful as usual, but with the easy assurance of a person definitely engaged, and proceeded to discuss the trip as though he had been part and parcel of it from the inception of the idea.

From that moment Bentley, so to speak, felt himself doubled, for hitherto he had not been able to be in two places at the same time, and he only

had two hands. Henceforward, where he could not be, Wells was, and Wells supplied an extra pair of hands, and invariably used them in exactly the manner that he would have wished them to be used had they been his own. In one thing alone he did not feel himself amplified, and that was in the power of speech, for Wells, for the most part, was silent, and spoke only after due reflection, and then his utterances were short and to the point.

With the assistance of Wells the remaining preparations proceeded with doubled rapidity, and after an official luncheon given him on the 18th April by the members of the Press of England at the "Trocadero," on Saturday morning, 19th April, 1907 Bentley, with Wells by his side, let in his clutch and started for Folkestone.

In the back of the car was one passenger, who was destined to accompany them wherever they went, and share their fortunes whatever they might be, unquestioningly and uncomplainingly. This was a young brindled bull-dog, named Bully, Bentley's inseparable companion, who, young as he was, was already much travelled, and who, since he had been at home, had found this new mode of progression admirably suited to his taste. For the most part he sat solemnly blinking at the wind that caused his eyes to water and his apology for a nose to become more shiny than usual, and if occasionally he condescended to bandy a few passing words with any particularly annoying street or road cur, a word

of reproach would make him thoroughly ashamed of himself for the momentary lapse of dignity. He had found plenty of room in his capacious heart for Wells, and his affection was reciprocated. Wells, however taciturn at other times, always found a word for Bully; there was a sort of mutual understanding between them—Bully looked after Wells' tools and coat and any other trifles that wanted minding, and Wells looked after Bully's food and general comfort.

From the expression on the faces of the three as they started, they might have been looking forward to a pleasure trip on the Continent instead of perhaps the most dangerous and arduous journey ever attempted by motorists.

They slept that night at the Lord Warden Hotel, Dover, where Bentley was entertained at dinner by a few ardent motorists, who had followed the car thus far from London, and some local celebrities.

The next morning the car was driven to Folkestone and duly shipped on the *Queen*, and after a somewhat rough passage, during which Bully sympathized with his friend Wells, who was not a first-rate sailor, they reached Boulogne, where the car was finally deposited on the quay, and the distressing, though presumably necessary, formalities were gone through before they were allowed to depart once more *en route* for Paris.

Wells had recovered by this time and was interested in his new surroundings. It was his first

trip abroad, and the method of driving on the "wrong side" caused some slight indignation at first.

Bentley could speak Zulu fairly fluently, considerable Amheric, and some Hindustani of the kitchen variety; he had a vague remembrance of having wasted some precious hours that might have been devoted to cricket in gazing blankly at pages of things that were called French irregular verbs; but as a linguist he was bounded by his own language, plus the smatterings enumerated above, which did not help very far in present needs.

Even through a friendly country a motor-car trip requires occasional assistance from the natives, although the route may be plain and the maps good. Petrol has to be bought, and it is annoying, after pronouncing the word very distinctly and with heightening inflexion of voice several times, to be at length furnished with an evil-smelling large tin of paraffin. To the British mind the stupidity of the obliging and smiling foreigner is pitiable, scarcely less ridiculous is it, when the discovery is made, after much gesticulation and pointing to the engine, that such an ordinary thing as petrol is called "Essence" (*anglice*, "Essaunce"). Imperturbable good-humour and the "Entente Cordiale," however, carried them through to Paris eventually, though, even before reaching that city, Wells had made up his mind that inquiries as to the correctness of the road were superfluous. On being urged thereto by

Bentley, who, although fairly convinced that they could not help but be on the right road, had been an amused audience to several conversations between Wells and those they passed in the vicinity of cross roads, he would shake his head and say: "It's no use, sir, he's only another silly Toodroy," which answer brought back to Bentley's mind a glimmering that at one time "Tout droit" had been impressed upon him as the French equivalent for "straight on," and so he communicated to Wells the intelligence that if, when in doubt, he shouted out the name of their destination and was fortunate to encounter a "Toodroy," progress would be satisfactory. This mode of procedure answered admirably—not only as far as Paris, but afterwards all the way to Marseilles; for the road being practically straight ahead all the way, almost every passenger was a potential, if not actual, "Toodroy."

At Paris they had some business to arrange with a couple of newspapers, and so they slept there the night. Wells was interested in the capital of France, and would not have been averse to prolonging his stay; but the hope of catching the boat of the Strick Line that was due to sail in a few days, necessitated an early start the following morning.

They made excellent time in beautiful weather, and Wells soon became reconciled to the foolishness of driving on the wrong side in view of magnificent roads and the absence of speed limit. He exchanged many salutations with amicable Toodroys, and when,

some three days later, they drove into Marseilles, to discover that town in the throes of the dock strike, even that dire intelligence was not enough at first to damp the exhilaration produced by the first splendid run.

But the dock strike proved to be a serious matter. The steamer they expected to be able to go by avoided the port altogether for fear of being held up, and their next chance was the s.s. *Amatonga*, of the Bucknell Line, on which they secured passages for Djibouti, on the coast of French Somaliland, and then set themselves to wait until the gods or the strikers permitted further progress. The ship, which was a tramp steamer trading between Manchester and the Persian Gulf, was already in dock, and Bentley discovered that Captain Clear was an old friend of his from Australia. Poor Captain Clear! this was destined to be his last voyage, for he died on the return journey; but all unconscious of his impending fate, he extended a warm welcome to the motorists, who were the only passengers, and thus Bully was promised the free run of the decks, although regulations doomed him to spend his nights with the butcher.

Then began a weary wait; each morning Wells, with Bully at his heels, would wander down disconsolately to inspect the large piles of stores, which were waiting the good-will of the strikers to be transferred from the quay into the hold of the s.s. *Amatonga*. There were many other and bigger

piles waiting; but to these they paid no more heed than did Bully to the advances of any chance French dogs that they might meet on their wanderings. On this one pile they fixed their despondent eyes until each separate tin or bale was indelibly imprinted on their brains. Perhaps here it would be as well to record what they gazed at.

1st.—750 gallons of petrol supplied by La Compagnie Générale de Petroleum, packed in 4-gallon tins, two tins to each case, well packed with cork dust.

2nd.—Food: 6 cases of Oxo, supplied by the Oxo Company, each case containing one gross of bottles.

100 tins of Armour's beef.
50 lbs. of Lipton's tea.
72 tins of Bath Oliver biscuits.
50 bags of Quaker Oats.
40 tins Huntley and Palmer's dry biscuits.
40 lbs. of Tate's cube sugar.
4 large cases Stower's lime juice.
2 gross of tins of Nestlé's condensed milk.
Assortment of potted meats from Lazenby.
2 gross tins of sardines, "Skipper" brand.
Cerebos salt and Colman's mustard.
40 bottles Branson's extract of coffee.
100 tins of soup and dripping, etc., from Army and Navy Stores.
A few bottles of Buchanan's whisky (taken for hospital use).
10 bags of flour.

3rd.—Clothes: Equipment supplied exclusively by Burberry; three changes each, consisting of Burberry's Gabardine shirts, suits, putties, etc.

Ordinary civilian kit to wear in towns.

Helmets made by Scott to special design of Bentley's, with removable covers.

4th.—Medicine-chest, supplied by Burroughs and Wellcome, No. 3 Congo type.

5th.—Prismatic compass, field-glasses, etc., supplied by Callaghan, of Bond Street.

6th.—Arms: Four .303 rifles and two .450 Colt revolvers; one Mauser automatic pistol (seven more .303 rifles and one Mauser rifle were bought at Djibouti, with four more .450 Colt revolvers).

7th.—Ammunition: This was picked up on the Somali coast, and consisted of 600 rounds taken through Somaliland and 2,000 rounds more sent on by rail to Harrar.

8th.—Tyres: Two spare sets, supplied by the Michelin Company.

9th.—Maps: Supplied by Bacon and Co., those used by the French Survey.

While Wells and Bully were making their careful mental inventory of the above stores, Bentley was occupying his time in gleaning as much further information as was likely to be useful to him. The French Government kindly lent him some further maps, and Mr. Skinner, the American Commissioner, happened to be in Marseilles, having just returned from Somaliland. This gentleman, who

has since published a book of his travels in Somaliland and Abyssinia, entitled, "Abyssinia of To-day," also kindly supplied maps, that he himself had made, on which were marked practicable routes.

Bentley had already decided on the route he should choose, but these additional details proved of the greatest service when in the country.

A full month went by before the ship could sail, and then it took twenty-seven days to reach Djibouti, calling at Suez and Port Said on the way.

CHAPTER II

Arrival at Djibouti—Mr. Vorperian of the *Daily Mail*—The Governor-General, M. Pascal—Official reception and banquet—Official attentions and delays—Arrival of George—Farewell to Djibouti—Into the sand *en route* for Zeila.

IT was just two months after leaving England that the s.s. *Amatonga* dropped anchor about three miles off the coast of French Somaliland, which was as near as it was practicable to approach the town of Djibouti.

The first person to appear over the side, after the doctor had certified a clean bill of health, was an Armenian gentleman, who inquired for Bentley and then introduced himself as Mr. Vorperian, the special correspondent of the *Daily Mail*. He handed Bentley a letter that he had received from the foreign Editor of that journal, and told him to consider that he was at his disposal in all things. He also informed Bentley that the Governor-General of the French Somaliland was waiting to give him an official reception. Bentley responded to the courtesy shown him with equal courtesy, and, in order not to be outdone in the matter of civility, assisted by Captain Clear, Mr. Vorperian, and one or two

quartermasters, hunted among the ship's bunting until they found a tricolour flag that would match the Union Jack that was already displayed on one side of the car that was standing on the deck ready for removal. This was duly attached to the other side of the car and the task began of slinging the car over the side into a barge that had come out from the shore for its reception.

Bully, as soon as he saw the car cleared for action, had assisted Wells in the final rub up, and then had taken his accustomed seat, having with canine foreknowledge, made up his mind that now a move was about to be made shortly. He watched with interest the attachment of the shackles of the derrick, and wagged his tail in a negative reply to Bentley's invitation to watch the descent of the car from the deck. He preferred to remain where he was, so Bentley gave the signal to lower away. Poor Bully, not having graduated in a school of aviation, he was somewhat perturbed at this new mode of progression, but too proud to show any emotion beyond a somewhat pathetic glance over the side at Bentley and Wells as they stood on the deck, now receding downwards from him. The upward flight, however, soon ceased, and he was once more on the level with his friends, but now rapidly descending seemingly into the sea. Again the pathetic look of farewell, to be shortly followed by a squeal of exuberant delight as the car touched bottom in the barge, and Wells, by this time quite a sailor, stepped

lightly down the companion ladder and took a flying leap into the barge.

Wells and Bully went ashore with the car, Bentley took advantage of the boat that had brought Mr. Vorperian, and went back with him.

Lining the shore was a crowd of the notabilities of Djibouti, and in the centre the Governor-General himself. Life in a town on the North-East Coast of Africa does not offer many excitements and the arrival of the first motor-car was " making history," as the Governor-General eloquently put it at the banquet in the evening, so there was small wonder if the event was duly celebrated.

The Governor-General had not much English, but what he had was considerably more than Bentley possessed of French, so with the assistance of Mr. Vorperian, who appeared to talk all languages equally well, the " Entente Cordiale," then in all the charm of novelty, was extended to the African Coast.

It transpired that Ras Madjassed, a special envoy from Menelek to the Court of Berlin, was expected the following day, and Bentley proposed to the Governor-General that he should drive him in the car to meet the Envoy on his arrival. This they did, and the worthy Ras was pleased, though somewhat perturbed, at the unexpected honour.

The arrival of the Special Envoy was an excuse for further celebrations, which lasted until his ship sailed. Then the protestations of every possible assistance to Bentley in his trip were renewed, and

no doubt eventually he would have been escorted through French Somaliland, by every available official and soldier, but it would have been "eventually," and he was not out to waste more time than was necessary, especially as he heard that two French cars were shortly leaving France, or were already *en route*, for the same destination as himself.

The ways of the official mind all the world over tend in the direction of procrastination, and the attributes of a successful diplomatist may be put down as power of delay and personal charm in about equal proportions. Nothing could have been more delightful than the friendly hospitality of the officials, great and small, of Djibouti to our travellers, or more touching than the evident trouble they were putting themselves to to make quite sure that the trip, when once started, should come to a successful issue. Meanwhile, while documents were being looked into, the state of the roads ascertained, the state of mind of the native tribes inquired into, all of which would take time, there were many objects of interest in the neighbourhood, a little practice in driving over Somaliland soil would be useful, and the officers were ever ready, willing and charming companions on such short trips.

Bentley was awaiting the arrival at Djibouti of an old acquaintance of his, in the person of one George, an anglicized Somali, who had been his body servant throughout both the campaigns before

mentioned. He had written to him and had found his reply waiting for him at Djibouti announcing that he was on his way. What his way was he did not add, but knowing him, Bentley felt assured that he would turn up sooner or later, probably sooner than later, and as it was impossible to start without him, he listened with seemingly grave attention to the manifold suggestions offered meanwhile as to the best means of conducting his trip.

One morning, after they had been in Djibouti about ten days, and seemed no nearer the point of making a start than they had been on the day of their arrival, on walking down the steps leading from the verandah of the hotel, Bentley encountered George, spotless in a suit of white duck, with a peaked yachting cap on his woolly head, the while his face appeared to be split in half by the expansiveness of his grin. Bentley strolled off in the direction of the shed where the car was garaged, and where he knew he should find Wells and Bully, and George followed.

In that historical shed, introductions were made and the covenant of service entered into, whereby George was for a certain definite wage promoted to the posts of interpreter, purveyor of camels, mules and human labour, water-finder, guide, kick-receiver, and general odd job man.

George grinned throughout the ceremony, rounded his mouth sufficiently to pronounce an "Ow!" when he was shown the car and its functions were

explained; and then grinned again, till Bully, whether from the effects of the heat or rivalry, grinned also. Wells, who had been a silent witness of the engagement, now remarked tersely that if it was to be judged by mouths the party would require some feeding.

Having ascertained that George's luggage consisted of the spotless ducks and nothing more, Bentley sent him off to purchase what he deemed necessary for a journey of probably some months. It transpired afterwards that George's mind did not range beyond another suit of spotless ducks for state occasions.

While George was shopping, Bentley and Wells drove the car to the railway depôt and, before an admiring crowd, took the body off, which they saw packed on to a truck and dispatched to Diredawa, whither most of their stores had already gone. They then proceeded to load the naked chassis with whatever seemed to Bentley likely to be required during the first stage of their journey, and selected a sufficiency of stores to load two dhows, which he had arranged with his agent M. Biejot, should be sent by sea to Zeila, the nearest coast town in British Somaliland. Timber was not lacking, so on what vacant space was left, they improvised a double seat for themselves, and a third seat right at the back for George; Bully could sit between them, or find a place for himself among the bales as he felt inclined. When the impedimenta were duly packed and covered

by several long planks of imported deal, on which the car was destined to make a great deal, if not most of its journey, Bentley made a few alterations in the nomenclature of some of the remaining packages, and also effected considerable alteration in their appearance. A friendly hint had given him reason for this, and afterwards they had cause to be thankful for the precaution.

They waited at the depôt until they had seen all their remaining goods safely loaded on trucks, and then left the car under the charge of George, who had joined them, while they walked back to the hotel for dinner. Bentley did not wish to excite attention by the sight of the transformed car, so he determined to drive it back to its shed garage without any ostentatious display of lamps as soon as most of the inhabitants had retired for the night.

It was his intention to make a start the following morning, and consequently they called on Mr. Vorperian as soon as they had safely housed the car and informed him of their intention. He was delighted to hear that they were starting, for he had been almost deceived by Bentley's seemingly ready acquiesence in the necessity of endless preparations. He promised to be there to see them off in the morning and also to be the first to meet them on their arrival at Diredawa.

Bentley and Wells then strolled once more round the town, by this time so familiar. Under the starry Eastern night the big building of the

"Gouvernement" loomed with almost colossal proportions above the coral rock houses of the merchants and other officials, while the more picturesque native quarters gradually disappeared in irregular dots of light and shadow into the darkness.

"We'd better be getting into bed, Wells," said Bentley at length, "and make the most of it, for it will probably be some time before we see either a bed or a mosquito-curtain again."

Wells nodded, and with a cheery "Good night, sir," went round to have one final look at the car before turning in. In the garage he fell over, and promptly grappled with something black; this turned out to be George minus his spotless ducks, whom Wells had forgotten, and whom, even if he had remembered, in his ignorance of native ways, he would not have credited with such a choice of sleeping accommodation. With some difficulty George explained his identity, and Wells chuckled at the sight of the spotless ducks neatly laid out on the planks which covered the car. He then left George to resume his interrupted slumbers and took Bentley's advice.

The next morning as early as he felt etiquette would permit, Bentley called on M. Pascal, the Governor, and thanked him heartily for the courtesy and hospitality shown him, at the same time intimating that it was his intention to start in about half an hour's time. "But, my dear Monsieur Bentley,

you will be killed if you start without an efficient escort, I cannot possibly allow you to go like this; if anything happened to you I should be blamed."

Bentley courteously but firmly replied that it was his intention to make as speedily as possible for the border of British Somaliland, that he was infinitely obliged for the goodwill that M. Pascal had shown him, but that he felt perfectly capable of reaching the frontier without any mishap, and that then M. Pascal's responsibility would cease.

M. Pascal shrugged his shoulders with a despairing gesture, but seeing that Bentley was not to be moved from his determination, said that at any rate he would attend his departure and wish him and his companion God-speed.

Bentley thanked him and said that after making a few more farewell visits he would drive up to Government House on the car and bid good-bye to M. le Gouverneur on the steps of his own house.

The news of their departure soon got round, and practically the whole population was assembled in the square before the Governor's official residence, when they drove up, looking, as Wells put it, "like a party making a midnight flit."

With much hand-shaking and many friendly wishes Bentley was at last allowed to take his seat beside Wells in the car from which the Union Jack and Tricolour still floated side by side.

Through the town, and for some few miles outside, Bentley knew that they could at any rate get

I leave car in charge of Wells and go off reconnoitring.

BRITISH SOMALILAND.

Some of our transport camels coming into camp.

SOMALILAND.

Cutting a passage for the car through the Scrub Country

Pioneer work in the bush

along, and they started at a fine pace amid admiring "Ow! Ow!'s" but soon the wheels began to sink into the sand, top speed came down to third, third to second, and very soon second to first. The combined effect of sun, which soon made it impossible to touch any iron work, and first-speed ploughing soon made the engine so hot that it was necessary to call a halt. They selected the shadiest clump of mimosa within reach and stopped the engine, for they did not want to begin with a seized piston.

The shade temperature, as Wells remarked, was not much hotter than an English oven, so they set cheerfully to work in preparing for further progress. George got into working costume, which presented no great difficulty, as it only meant the removal of the white ducks; the two white men rolled up the sleeves of their shirts and proceeded to unlash the planks from the car. With the perspiration dripping from them, for the slightest manual labour in the Somali climate becomes at once fatiguing to heat-relaxed muscles, they finally unlashed the ropes and laid the six long planks on the ground by the side of the car and—looked at them.

Bentley then beckoned to George in his capacity of purveyor of human labour, and after some moments of serious conversation sent him off on foot, and the Englishmen sat on the ground and smoked and waited.

The speedometer marked four miles, and considering that they had only left Djibouti two hours

before, so far they had made satisfactory progress, as African travelling goes. George was not likely to hurry himself unduly, so they had plenty of time to meditate and melt.

The prospect they saw before them was tantalizing in the extreme, for right up to the horizon they saw what looked like perfectly smooth macadamized roads winding in all directions between the clumps of mimosa and the patches of long grass; but these seeming roads were merely stretches of loose sand, which was ready to take the wheels up to the axles. Occasional patches of mouse-coloured earth gave hopes that for a few yards between the sand roads they might be able to crawl along over ridges and stunted bushes without the aid of planks. Bentley spent a good deal of the three hours wait in thinking, and eventually he roused Wells up from an uneasy slumber and gave him his ideas on the question of tyres. As long as they made a plank road the tyres would hold out, but progress would be at the rate of about a foot a minute, and they were not going to break any world's records at that, and it was doubtful if Menelek would live long enough to receive them if they did eventually, in their old age, reach Adis Ababa. If they left the planked sand and tried to force their way through such low vegetation as was at all passable, the tyres, as they were, would be torn to ribbons in the first mile. So when at length George returned, accompanied by a few friends, whose truculent looks he vouched

were only skin deep, while their hearts were in the right place, Bentley told him that he must make yet another journey, this time in his capacity of buyer to the firm. First of all, however, he must resume his post as interpreter and explain to the new levies that they would only be impeded in their actions by the bundles of unpleasant looking spears which they were lovingly fingering, and that as a preliminary those had better be deposited in a bundle on the car.

The new apprentices demurred somewhat at this at first, but having ascertained that the car was going with them and that consequently their goods would be easily accessible, each time they passed backwards and forwards, in the event of need, finally acquiesced, and were at first inclined to think that they had struck rather a soft job, when it was explained to them that in place of carrying the usual porter's load, they would only have to shift a few planks, two men to each plank. The amount of pay was settled with some haggling, the potentialities of the car, as an instrument of "Jadoo" (witchcraft), demonstrated by the simple process of inviting them to take a short rest by sitting on such portions of the chassis that were exposed, the while Wells, by manipulating the accumulator, had set up a satisfactory "short." The apprentices left their seats with startling unanimity, and were with difficulty persuaded from tendering their resignations by a bolt *en masse* into the scrub. Another bolt nearly followed the starting

of the engine, and they watched its cautious advance over the first three pairs of planks with wondering dismay.

About an hour of practice, however, made them accustomed to the strange, though evidently tame, new monster of the white man.

In Djibouti Bentley had been told stories of the first experiences of the railway, and how the natives, who are not lacking in courage, as our soldiers have experienced, considered that this was a new kind of beast, and, as such, fit to be killed. They therefore were in the habit of getting in front of trains and throwing spears at them, and it took the loss of quite a number of legs and arms to convince the survivors of the futility of such warfare. The possibility that the first movement of the car might arouse the sporting instincts of his new servants had made Bentley particularly anxious to relieve them of their spears while the car still remained an inert mass.

Seeing that at length progress, such as it was, was being made satisfactorily and as smoothly as could be expected, Bentley returned to the question of tyres. He sent George back to Djibouti to M. Biejot, and requested that gentleman to send out a mule-load of raw rubber, such as there was plenty of lying about in the stores, and at the same time to send out two hides of freshly-killed bullocks.

They then worked on with as little cessation as possible, and by nightfall, when, wearied and spent—

for they had taken it in turns to assist the plank-layers—they examined the speedometer, they had the somewhat doubtful satisfaction of seeing that it now marked seven miles from Djibouti, or, in other words, that five hours' incessant labour had helped them on their road just three miles. At this rate the forty-five miles to Zeila would take them the best part of a week, and Bentley looked out anxiously for the return of George.

The Somalis were already complaining, and no doubt in the morning would be unwilling to resume work, for the use of unaccustomed muscles would make them stiff, and they were sure to imagine that some new sickness had seized them. Wells, cheerful as ever, was busying himself with the erection of the small tent they had brought with them and was chaffing Bully, who was lying a supine mass, with his mouth open like the lid of a portmanteau and his tongue protruded its full length. Bully had had enough of it for one day, and nothing would induce him to move. Wells finished the erection of the tent, and then strolled down to join Bentley, who had wandered away from the car to the sort of half-pool, half-well, that seemed to have been formed by a stream trying to force its way into the sand and having been swallowed up in the attempt. It was the vicinity of this water that induced Bentley to call a halt some half-hour earlier than he would otherwise have done, for, in the first place, it would be convenient, and, in the second, the

Somalis, evidently intended to stop there, and any altercation at so early a stage of proceedings was undesirable. As the water probably served for the drinking-place of any lions or leopards, to say nothing of the hyenas, that were sure to be in the neighbourhood, Bentley had camped at a discreet distance, but had walked down to examine the innumerable prints of hoof and claw impressed in the moist, sandy soil. Here Wells joined him, and Bully, realizing that he was left alone, waddled lazily after him, and when he reached the water, lay down in it with a flop, and finally emerged a mass of wet sand, but comparatively cool and contented once more, but hurt when his friends showed no great eagerness for his caresses.

George arrived about an hour after sundown, attracted by the flare of the searchlight lamp, which they had lit for his benefit, and which had nearly caused a fresh stampede of the Somalis, who, although at length pacified, absolutely refused to allow its rays to fall on them.

"That lamp will be useful to us before we are through, Wells," Bentley remarked reflectively. "These niggers are more or less civilized and accustomed to the white man and his ways; it will probably interest the untutored savage."

Although the day had been an arduous one, there was no rest for the white men that night, for when George arrived with the rubber they set to work immediately in constructing shields for their tyres.

Showing how we repaired tyres with raw hide and rubber

Tyres ready for the road again

Entrance to the walled city of Harrar. The Governor's gateway. Wells and self in foreground. (See page 117.)

The tyres themselves were filled with a resilient solution, that at the time gave great promise of being useful; but no unprotected cover had a chance of surviving a day of the work to which it would be necessary to subject it if any progress was to be made.

So they took the raw soft rubber and laid it in layers over the covers to the depth of fully an inch, and then, cutting the raw hide into strips, they sewed this firmly over the rubber. Working in the light of the search-lamp and the two acetylene lamps, they were soon surrounded by the cloud of insects of all descriptions that no one who has not been in the tropics can realize. Ninety per cent. of that particular crowd that assisted at the covering of the tyres seemed provided with the necessary utensils for stinging or biting; the other ten per cent. were satisfied by getting in the way in every conceivable manner. Bentley, with a shoemaker's needle in his hand, was trying to locate with the other the holes that Wells had punched and was punching in the hide, so neither of them had much capability of waving away the buzzing, hissing, singing and stinging swarms.

They worked on grimly and in silence, Wells only once volunteering a remark, which was: "Oh, my mammy! to think that I was flogged once for going moth-hunting with a lantern in the Isle of Wight."

Although they worked the whole night through to the concert of hyena laughter that would effectually

have prevented them from sleeping if they had been able to lie down to try and get some rest, the sun rose before they had completed three tyres, and it was necessary to give them each a good three hours' baking in the sun before they could attempt to run on them.

Soon after sunrise, therefore, Bentley gave George the rations for the men, and then provided them with axes, shovels and knives, and sent them on ahead, having first of all explained to George what he wanted done. This was to choose as practicable a road as could be found, tending somewhere in the direction of Zeila, always giving preference to firm ground over sand. Where practicable, a path was to be cleared through low-lying scrub, and stretches of sand were to be chosen only when any other way was impossible. The Somalis, inclined to be fretful over their aching backs but pleased with the axes, shovels and knives, started off contentedly enough, and George was told to bring them back to camp at midday. The two Englishmen then resumed their tyre covering, and having completed the fourth, went down to the water and washed, and then took turns at sleeping in the shade.

CHAPTER III

En route for Zeila—Mr. Hastings Thompson, British resident, does not approve of expedition—Arrival at Zeila—Wreck of dhows and loss of provisions—Official discouragement—Off at last into desert—Hardships of journey—First news received of hostility of Isas—Arrival at frontier.

AT midday George and his contingent returned, and as they approached, Bentley noticed that their number had been augmented by one.

This proved to be a runner, bearing a letter addressed to him from no less a person than Mr. Hastings Thompson, the British Resident at Zeila. The contents of the note were not reassuring or of an encouraging nature, for he was adjured to abandon his mad attempt to take a car through the country. Attention was officially called to the fact that the natives of British Somaliland were congratulating themselves on their country having escaped the inroads of the railway, which they looked upon with fear and detestation; that the advent of a motor-car was sure to connect itself with the idea of a railway, and that trouble was sure to follow its appearance.

The tone of the note was courtesy itself, and ended in a cordial invitation to Bentley to come

to Zeila, if he had already left Djibouti, where he would be most welcome; but, at the same time, it was made quite clear that no efforts would be left unemployed to induce him to return to Djibouti and send the car by rail—at any rate, as far as Diredawa, where, once inside Abyssinia, British officialdom would be able to wash its hands of any responsibility for his self-sought fate.

Bentley wrote a brief reply, stating that he was on his way, and hoped to reach Zeila almost as soon as the runner.

By this time the tyres, owing to the shrinkage of the wet raw hide under the fierce rays of the sun, were hard, compact, resilient masses, and the wheels were again fixed to the axles, the boxes on which the chassis had been supported removed, and the jacks let down.

The car was then again packed and a fresh start was made, the planks being directed towards the first bit of path cleared by George in the morning.

Half an hour's work brought them to this, and when they were on firm soil, the planks were once more lashed on the car, and they started cautiously upon George's idea of a road.

The Somalis, by this time familiar with the car's mode of progression, walked alongside, for the pace was not exhilarating, and by their laughter and chattering evidently much preferred this system of travelling to either porterage or plank-laying.

That day, by alternately crawling at a foot's pace

ZEILA, BRITISH SOMALILAND.

The camels I used for transport purposes in Somaliland.

Zeila. Giving natives shocks off coil

Getting through soft sand with the aid of planks.

BRITISH SOMALILAND

through low-lying scrub and laying planks over intervening stretches of sand, they made the record run of nearly twelve miles, but as Wells remarked, the pace was too killing to last. The rate of twelve miles in seven hours would mean over twenty miles for a full day, so that the next night might bring them almost in touch with Zeila.

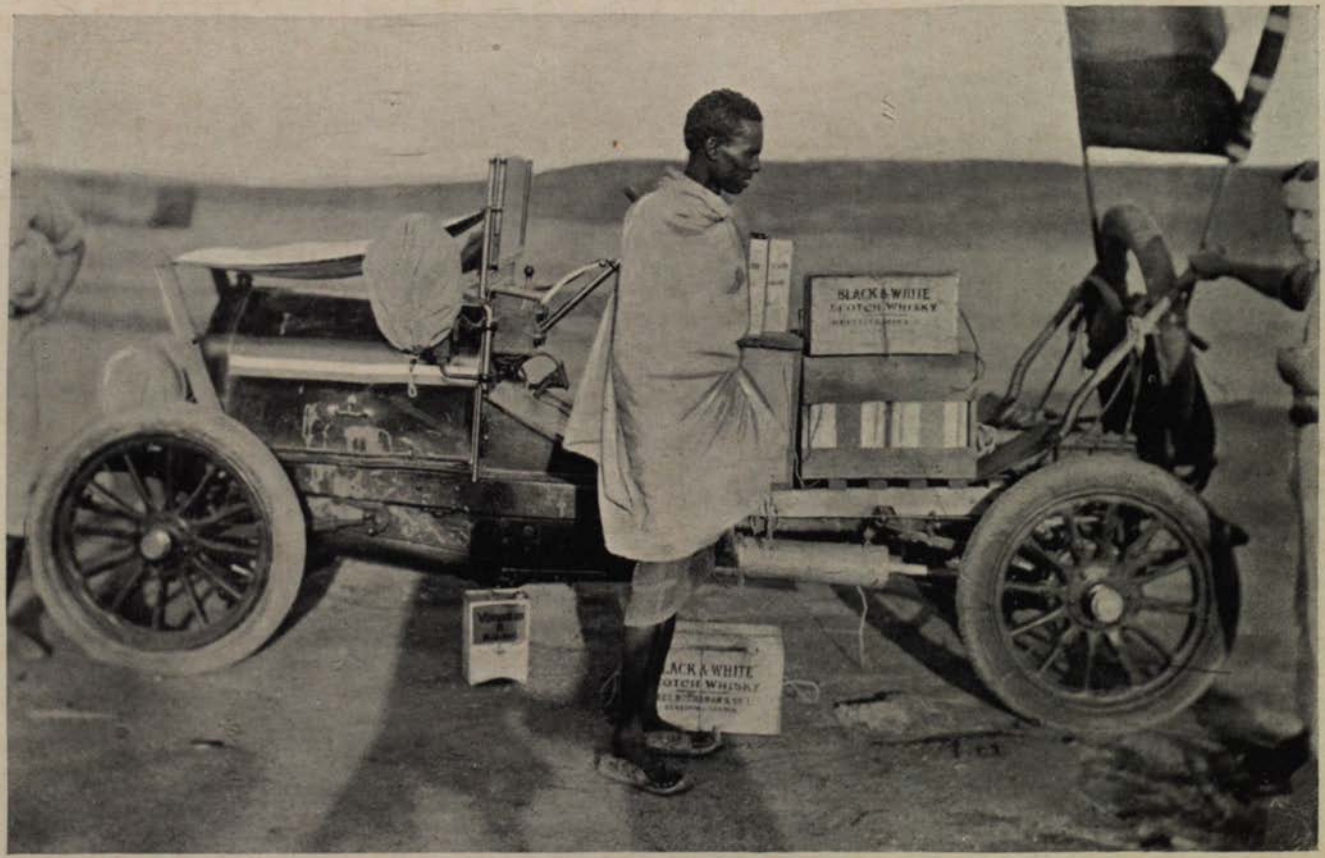
But this was not to be; the next day only saw them a further fifteen miles on their weary way. The heat was appalling, and the unavoidable sands more frequent. Wells' arms, not yet acclimatized to a tropical sun, had swollen up in huge blisters, that in conjunction with mosquito-bites had put him practically hors-de-combat.

As they hoped to strike Zeila some time in the course of the next day, and as Bentley was not in the least put off his determination to continue his journey as already planned, the next morning he sent George on ahead to secure sufficient camels to transport the stores that should by this time be waiting for them at Zeila. By now they had established perfectly friendly relations with their Somalis, and they had both picked up the few words necessary to encourage exertion; so George, the interpreter, could be spared.

They reached Zeila in the evening of the fourth day after leaving Djibouti, and although their arrival excited no little friendly interest among the inhabitants, both European and native, there was no overt demonstration of joy by British officialdom.

Added to this, no sooner had Bentley entered the Residency, where he had been offered hospitality during his stay, than he was informed that his two dhows had been wrecked by a storm on their way from Djibouti, and that all his stores were consequently at the bottom of the sea. He immediately sent a runner to M. Biejot, in the hope that in spite of his demand that his goods might be immediately forwarded to Diredawa, sufficient of them would still be remaining at the depôt for the loading of two further dhows, or, at any rate, that a sufficient store of petrol and oil would be there. His hope was not disappointed, for in three days, thanks to the never-failing willingness of M. Biejot, assisted by Mr. Vorperian, he had news that two more dhows, fully equipped, had already started.

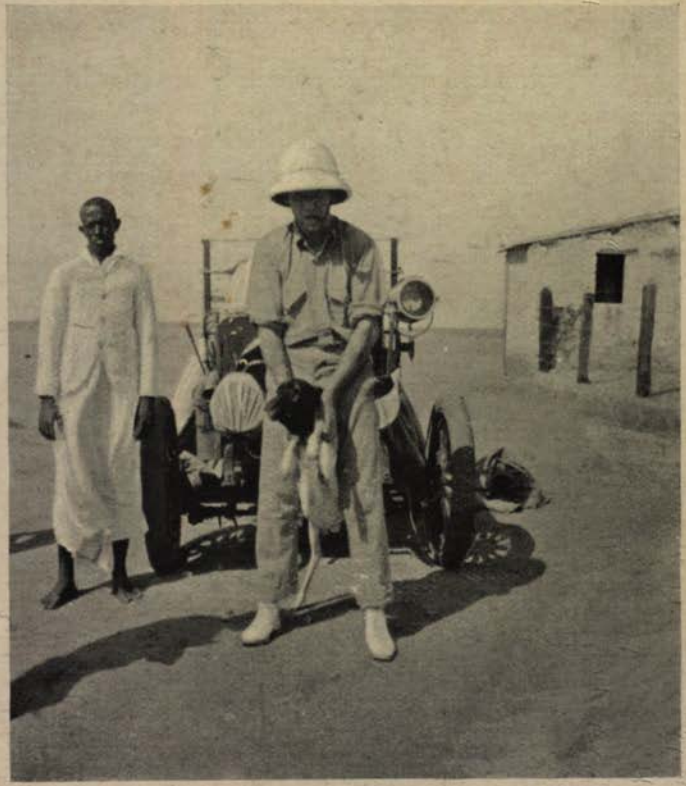
At best it meant a delay of some four or five days more at Zeila, in close touch with reluctant authority. Now, British Authority, like Authority everywhere else, is not averse to successful performances which may bring kudos to the British flag, which kudos might otherwise be obtained by some other flag; but having with some little difficulty, and by the expenditure of several millions of pounds and many valuable lives, taught the neighbouring population that the white man was not made to be speared on sight and afterwards carved up according to taste—a lesson, be it said, that they had learned very badly and were terribly likely to forget on occasion—they had no desire to have to send puni-



CENTRAL SOMALILAND.

The car in fighting trim. We went to Railhead on chassis only.

Scrub Country, British Somaliland.



I buy a Somali sheep

tive expeditions and things of that sort out because a mad Englishman tried to do an impossible thing and got wiped out for his pains.

The gist of this, in formal and courteous official language, was duly imparted to Bentley during the next four days, and once or twice the discussion waxed warm. They were no nearer the solution of the vexed question when the dhows arrived—this time safely.

George had already secured a sufficiency of camels, and these, under the supervision of Wells, were duly packed and despatched on the route which Bentley gave to George, without any undue blowing of trumpets, the while Bentley argued with Authority.

When the last camels were well on their way, Bentley announced that he had now made all due preparations, and with the Authority's kind permission would be off the following morning. Then the official mind began to think of forcibly detaining him, but fortunately for him, official minds are not often moved to come to decisions quickly, so the next morning, as stated, Bentley, Wells and Bully—for George was on ahead with the camels—accompanied by the six faithful Somalis, left Zeila in the early dawn without waiting for the formality of an official "send off."

There is a good deal of difference between persuading someone not to go, and bringing that same person back by force when once he has gone. Bentley appreciated this difference, and so, on due reflection,

did Authority. Bentley also fully recognized the anxiety shown as to his safety; but knowing the country intimately and the manners of the inhabitants, he anticipated little difficulty in reaching the border, at any rate, and preferred that, should there be any real risk, the blame for incurring it should rest entirely on his own shoulders. Bentley fully realized that Mr. Hastings Thompson could not have acted differently, for Authority is admittedly bounded by the protection of white lives, and is powerless against intertribal feuds. White men, when pursuing the ordinary mode of progression of a traveller, are at no time particularly safe, and it was more than probable that the advent of a new kind of machine might be taken as a fresh act of aggression.

However, they were well on their way again, and all their thoughts and energies had to be devoted to the business of their daily work. Then began the usual life of the African traveller, with the added difficulty of getting the car along. They first had to traverse what is known as desert land, for the reason that it is covered by three things only—sand, scrub and stones. These huge stones, the débris of a volcanic age, jutted out of the sand on all sides, and between them grew the scrub. It is not true desert, but, as Wells remarked: "Quite near enough to the actual thing for his taste." Sometimes, very rarely, they found a few miles over which they could actually run at second speed; but often a full day's

labour resulted in only an additional three miles being registered on the speedometer.

So far, thanks to precautionary doses of quinine and other visits to the medicine-chest, which Bentley's experience of Africa rendered advisable, they kept in fairly good health. Wells felt the effects of the heat the most of the party, for Bentley had lived mostly in the tropics for the last dozen years; and Bully, having been born at Aden from an acclimatized mother, found the heat more annoying than surprising. To Wells, however, the charm of novelty made up in a great measure for the hardships and discomforts, and, as yet, beyond the thousand-and-one contretemps that cropped up every day to delay progress, nothing of any really serious nature had occurred, and the trip might be said to be progressing satisfactorily. It is true that sleep at night was, thanks to the attentions of the mosquitoes and the music of the hyenas, not of the untroubled order; that the days went by in unceasing toil under a sun that seemed to beat the body down into the ground by sheer weight of fire; that water was rare, and when forthcoming, of a taste and colour unspeakable; that there was no appetite for such food as George prepared, the principal ingredient of which seemed to be sand; that the stimulating effect that might have been obtained from whisky was rigidly barred; but the attentions of the natives had so far been friendly. When Bentley was last in the country, the sight of a Somali had invariably

been a test of the relative velocities of powder-propelled lead and human-propelled steel; and it was difficult to realize that conditions were now supposed to be changed, and he was ever on the look-out for any hostile demonstrations on the part of the inhabitants of such native villages that they approached.

George and his attendant sprites, however, were of the greatest use, for they knew, what Bentley did not, the state of intertribal feelings. It was not their ambition to meet any compatriots, who might not appreciate the assistance that they were rendering to the white man, and so any deviation from the direct line suggested by George was acquiesced in at once without question, even though it might entail several miles of extra road-making.

Game, even in the desert land, had been seen on all sides; but when they reached the plateau, where vegetation and long grass began to be more plentiful, in some places even luxuriant, they could have had as much shooting as they wished if they had had time to devote to sport. Antelopes of all kinds abounded, from the Kudu to the graceful, tiny "Dig-dig," and they shot what they wanted for "pot" without any difficulty.

Already they had bagged three leopards as they came down to drink in the early morning; that there were plenty of lions about was evident, not only by the roaring at night, but by the spoor which surrounded such rare water as they came to.

The ordinary mode of progression was as follows: George with the camels would go on ahead, the camels carrying the water-tanks and stores, the Somalis would follow as close on the heels of the camels as possible. Bentley and Wells took it in turns to superintend the preparation of the track by this advance party, which, when they struck sand, would halt until the arrival of the car, to assist in plank laying. The other white man, not on duty with the road clearers, would drive the car along with such speed as was possible.

Motoring under these conditions was certainly a novel experience, the principal trouble being overheating, for the sun alone was sufficient to almost boil the water in the radiator, and as the road was such that it required the throttle fully open on first speed to force the car along, the stops on this account were constant.

As they were not seeking advertisement, they kept well away from the ordinary caravan routes, although Bentley, through the field-glasses, could often see strings of camels on the horizon, making for and returning from Abyssinia.

So the weary days went on until Bentley judged that they must be within thirty miles of the borders of the Isa country, an independent State lying between British Somaliland and Abyssina.

One morning, as they were preparing for the day's work, a runner carrying a letter appeared, and after the manner of runners handed his missive to the

first white man he met. The address was not particularly legible, and Bentley, thinking that it had probably been sent after him from Zeila, tore it open with a premonition of trouble.

It turned out not to be addressed to him at all, but was from the British Resident at Harrar, in Abyssinia, to the Commissioner at Zeila. Seeing his name mentioned, Bentley took the liberty of reading. The gist of the communication was as follows: "On no account allow Bentley to start. News of his coming has reached the Isas, and they take him for the advance of the railway and are arming, prepared to stop him at all costs."

Bentley refolded the note, gave it back to the runner, and waved him towards the coast. He did not think it necessary to say anything of what he had read to Wells before he had made some independent inquiries, beyond stating that he heard that it was probable that there would be another official reception on the border. Wells was not enamoured of official receptions, for so far they had tended to delay, so he answered: "Indeed, sir; I hope they won't take so long about it as the last lot."

Instead of resuming their journey that day Bentley chose a hill in the neighbourhood, and they worked the car up its stony sides.

Then Bentley announced that he was going forward with George and one other Somali to do some reconnoitring, and left Wells in charge of the camp

and camels, saying that they had all better take a good day's rest.

He then started on foot, taking one camel with them to carry the necessary supplies. He wished to ascertain if his coming was expected in the near future, or whether he would have time to get through by making a dash for it and leave the Isas to make their preparations to stop him behind his back.

He was gone nearly twenty-four hours, and during that time learnt enough to know that getting through surreptitiously was not to be thought of, for the border was already teeming with Isas evidently on the look-out for something, which without undue conceit he might put down to be himself.

Now, for reasons of policy Bentley had so far given it out that he was making for Gildessa, a village on the other side of the Isa country. He had made no secret of this, and was therefore convinced that if the Isas were aware of his advent, they were equally well aware of his destination. In his own mind he had determined to reach Diredawa by the Lassarat and Douanlé route, and to branch off towards the latter post, which at one time had been the terminus of the railway. His reason for announcing that Gildessa was his objective was to secure, at any rate, unopposed journeying for his camels and stores as far as Lassarat, for as he knew that his Somalis and the camel drivers would not be anxious to attempt to cross the Isa country in

face of opposition, it was his intention to tell them to make their way to Diredawa by the road to Lassarat and Douanlé, parting company with them as soon as they were in touch of the border, and intending to wait for them and pick them up at Douanlé, for which post he proposed making with all speed, leaving Gildessa well away to the left.

When he got back to camp, he found, as he had anticipated, that news of the movements of the Isas had already preceded him, with a consequent reluctance of his followers to proceed further. To nip any growing dissatisfaction in the bud, he announced promptly that he had made up his mind to send the whole caravan round by the usual route to Lassarat and thence by Douanlé to Diredawa, where they were to wait for him, if their roads did not join before. He took the precaution of sending a letter to Mr. Vorperian, at Diredawa, explaining that if the camels arrived before him, it would be because he was having trouble with the Isas, and leaving that gentleman, in such case, to appeal to Menelek for assistance, or punishment, as the occasion might demand.

In order to save as much delay and fatigue as possible, the camels and Somalis were to accompany them to within a couple of miles of the Isa border, and then were to veer to the north and seek the usual caravan route, leaving the car to go on alone. Fortunately they were now leaving the area of loose sand, and although progression was not much more

rapid for that, still the soil was firmer and the planks had only to be brought into use to enable them to get over the innumerable crevices made by the rains.

Bentley explained the whole situation to Wells over the camp-fire that night, and Wells took the prospect of trouble in the same spirit as he had shown when accepting the original proposition made to him. What appeared to interest him most was the hope held out by Bentley that the travelling might be better and better as they got on, in so far as the firmness of the ground was concerned. Wells was suffering most from the indignity of having to crawl along no quicker than a " bloomin' camel," and his great ambition was for a stretch of land where he could show the niggers what the car could do. Such little inconveniences as the possibility of being speared were altogether a secondary consideration, and he was rather pleased than otherwise at the prospect of the departure of the caravan by a different route, for he had hitherto felt that, however good the ground might be, he should never be allowed to leave the camels behind. In spite of rough usage, thanks to his solicitous care, the car kept in excellent order, and it was with a sigh of satisfaction that the next evening he saw the caravan depart almost in the same direction as they had come, for the drivers were not anxious to skirt the Isa country too closely.

They were now scarcely two miles from the border,

and they camped, keeping a careful watch, and omitting to light the lights of the car, which might attract unnecessary attention. They had no visitors during the night beyond a more than usual number of hyenas, for they kept the camp fires low, only kicking up a few sparks occasionally when the nightly marauders seemed inclined to come too near.

CHAPTER IV

Land purchase as between civilized and uncivilized—Trouble with Isas—A prohibitive protection tariff—George as diplomatist—Isa King induced to let them pass—Hurried flight through almost impassable country—Arrive at Douanlé ahead of pursuing Isas.

BEFORE relating the events that followed the crossing of the Isa border, it may be as well to give some idea of the history of dealings of European States with the various Somali chieftains. It is a repetition of what has occurred all over the world in dealings with savage tribes.

The king, or chief, is induced to sell either a portion or the whole of his land, for more or less valuable consideration. Whether the land is his to sell, is not closely inquired into; he has had the money, and if his people do not like the change of rulers, or the fact that the land which they considered theirs no longer belongs to them, but is possessed by some one who has the means of backing up his claim by weapons of precision, they have to make the best of it, and only rebel until they have learnt to appreciate the value of the said weapons of precision.

The actual valuable consideration given for the

strip of land now French Somaliland was the equivalent of two thousand pounds English—not a very large sum considering the acreage, but quite a tidy little amount to the chief, or chiefs, who actually fingered the money. Their followers did not in all cases, having received nothing and lost everything, experience the same sense of gratification; and hence trouble, resulting in various petty wars.

From all this, one fact has been made clear to the native mind, and that is, that the white man has money and can be induced to part with it. At the same time it has been made clear that unpleasantness may arise from the fact of entirely ignoring the feelings of one's subjects.

Arithmetic has not reached a very advanced state; scarcely as far as the schoolboy of history who recorded his impressions of the science in verse. The multiplication of their subjects was all very well, provided that it did not imply division of their own personal gains, in which case fractions would undoubtedly drive them mad.

Consequently, in dealing with the white man, the chief has learnt to consider the feelings of his followers, but he is prone to consider their feelings at the expense of the white man rather than his own.

Especially is this the case when the chief owes his sovereignty to many petty chiefs, who are liable to make things unpleasant if they are forgotten when it comes to a question of "Baksheesh."

With the Isas, up to the advent of the railway

through French Somaliland, a great deal of their earnings had depended on the caravans that they took across their country into Abyssinia. They already were feeling the effects of the railway in the divergence of a very great deal of the transport, so they had no reason to bless the railway or the white man who brought the cursed thing into the country of the true believer. Their arithmetic was sufficient to make them aware that railways, as well as other things, are capable of multiplication and addition, and the idea of another railway directing itself across their very caravan routes was abhorrent to them. At the same time, they were philosophical, with the philosophy ever learnt by tribes further into the interior, from the fate of their fellows near the coast. Resistance to the white man was in the end futile, and they were bound eventually to succumb to the inevitable; but, meanwhile, a show of resistance meant compensation, and often good money was to be squeezed out of the white man in preference to fighting. Whether the white man was a private individual or a State it was a difficult matter to discover, and really a matter of no great moment, for if they killed any sort of white man the State made as much fuss about him as though he were a king, and consequently all white men must be important, except those who came out to fight, quite a number of whom could be killed without further addition to the bill demanded for the original spear-thrust.

Such was roughly the state of affairs, and the disposition of mind of the Isas assembled to meet the car, when Bentley and his companions crossed the borders in the early morning of the next day.

The ground was rough but hard, and they were able to make progress sometimes at a faster rate than a man could run, but at the same time keeping a careful look-out lest the innumerable small fissures, that they were able to bump over, should suddenly be intersected by one as large as a ditch covered with scrub. They had nearly been caught this way several times, and on one or two occasions the front of the car suddenly dropped and they had had great trouble in levering it back again on to the level. The plateau land of the Isa country is fairly undulating and plentifully covered with vegetation of what may be termed the dry sort. Mimosa, scrub, and long dry grass, with bare patches in between, seamed, as has been said, by innumerable fissures, due partly to the heat and partly to the channels cut by the rains.

They presumed that they were actually at the border from the fact that, on topping a rise, they saw between them and the next rise of any importance, about a mile off, a mass of men who were evidently waiting for them some three hundred yards away.

It was no use showing the white feather, and so Bentley drove on towards them as unconcernedly as was possible. The crawling, jerking, and swaying nature of their progression would not have made much of an impression at home, but such as it was

A mid-day halt under Mimosa tree

Our palaver with the Isa Chiefs in Somaliland. Wells tries to frighten them by driving the car furiously round in circles.

Our stockaded camp in Somaliland.

Camels feeding on Mimosa.

it seemed to work the savages in front into a frenzy of excitement. They did not advance on the car, nor did they make a movement by way of retiring, but they danced about, gesticulating and talking vigorously to each other, and as they were all armed with a various assortment of spears, the matter of their conversation would have been interesting to our travellers if they had been near enough to hear and could have understood.

When about thirty paces away from the front ranks, Bentley stopped the car, and turning to Wells said: "Nice little lot—ain't they? Seem annoyed about something, too. Better hitch on that old interpreter wallah and find out something about it."

Wells slipped out of his seat just in time to catch George—who, when the car stopped, was beginning a strategic movement to the rear—firmly by the ear, as he was vacating his seat, and led him gently to the post of honour in front of the radiator.

"George," said Bentley, "ask them what they want; and please ask them not all to reply at once."

George stepped, somewhat gingerly, two or three paces forward, and three or four natives, who by an extra necklace or so might be taken to be gentlemen of importance, came forward to meet him. A few words were interchanged, and then George returned to the car perhaps a shade more rapidly than he had advanced.

"They say, boss, that they have been sent by the King to stop the iron caravan till his arrival."

"The deuce they have!" said Bentley; "and when may His Majesty be expected?"

George turned round to the chiefs, who were now a few paces nearer, and who came still nearer as he began to speak; then a strange thing happened, for the chiefs, if they were chiefs, suddenly bobbed down and peered at the car, and then rejoined their companions with as much dignity as they could muster so long as celerity was not impeded, paying not the slightest attention to what George was shouting.

"That's funny!" said Bentley, watching their retreating forms. "Did you pull faces at them, Wells?"

"No, sir. Seems to be something in the car that scared them. They were all looking at the dashboard. Here come a few more to have a peep. Don't believe their friends, it seems."

Very cautiously another dozen or so of natives approached the car, and when they got within about ten yards, bent down as the others had done, and then, with even less care for dignity than the first lot, proceeded to a safer distance.

"Undoubtedly there's a spook in the car somewhere," said Bentley, more and more mystified. "He'll be dashed useful, if he's a tame one and stops. You might just stroll round in front of the car, Wells, and, if you see anything that will do for a spook, you might do 'Poojah' to him of sorts, for the benefit of the crowd."

"Right, sir," Wells answered, slipping from his seat and walking quietly to about the same distance in front of the car that the warriors had reached. He then turned round and faced the car, and Bentley saw him bend down as the Isas had done. Then he solemnly straightened his back, politely lifted his helmet to the dashboard, struck several operatic attitudes and finished by a stately *pas seul*.

The circumstances as a whole were not such as tended to unseemly levity, but the solemnity of Wells was ludicrous in the extreme, and Bentley could with difficulty keep a straight face as, in as solemn tones as he could muster, he said: "Come out of that, you d——d lunatic! What is it?"

Wells, with a final salutation to the dashboard, came back to the car, slowly and solemnly. "Merely that the angle of light has turned the wind-screen into a most effective mirror, sir," he said, as he resumed his seat. "They must have seen what they thought was another lot of niggers that the car had swallowed. Pity we didn't think of bringing a wardrobe door along with us."

This was a long speech for Wells, but perhaps the occasion justified it.

The scene at the moment was an impressive one. In the car were two impassive and square-set Englishmen, with an equally impassive and square-set bulldog between them, with a woolly head and peaked cap just peeping over the bales at the back, and in front a seething mass of savages, who were evidently not

at all friendly, but who were mystified and perturbed, but still inquisitive.

"Here they come again, sir," said Wells, as a movement forward took place once more.

Whether the Isas were endeavouring to imitate Wells' antics in the hope of propitiating the demon in the car, or whether they were merely endeavouring to obtain a better view, they formed themselves into straggly ranks, and soon a long line of savages, about twelve men abreast and a hundred deep, was bobbing up and down in front of the car in a manner that was sufficiently ludicrous.

"This is all very well," said Bentley, "but it won't last, and they will have the devil of a yarn to tell the King, when he does come; and he'll ask us to turn the spirit on again, and we shan't be able to do it. What rotten luck!"

In his irritation, without thinking what he was doing, he gave the horn bulb by his side a vicious squeeze. It was a specially selected horn, chosen for its penetrating tone, and now, owing to exposure and general ill-usage, endowed with a wheezy throatiness that rendered the sound produced such as a melancholy and consumptive mastodon might have made to relieve his feelings.

The effect was instantaneous and satisfying. Not one of the fifteen hundred warriors stopped running under a quarter of a mile.

"Dynamite isn't in it, sir," said Wells, as they recovered from the astonishment caused by the

unexpected stampede. "I believe they think the old car's alive."

"That's as it may be," said Bentley, suddenly serious again. "If I mistake not, however, here comes His Majesty in person, with another little sample lot."

"You're right, sir," said Wells ruefully; "and, what's more, they seem to have seen the bolt, and are coming along, hell for leather, to put things right. 'Spect they think we've been scrapping and that the first round has gone to us."

The discomfited natives took heart of grace under the eye of their ruler, and joined in the advance, so that now a solid body of some three thousand men approached the car.

"It's either cut and run back to the coast, if they'll let us—which is doubtful once we turn tail—or bluff," said Bentley. "Are you game to take the risks, Wells? It's our only chance of ever setting eyes on Menelek."

"Right, sir," said Wells, and he shifted his revolver a little more to the front.

Bentley saw the action and said: "That won't be much use, I'm afraid, except as a preventative to vivisection. We must try the effect of amicable palaver first." So speaking, he got out of the car and walked towards the advancing savages.

Signalling out the most likely to be the King, he did not wait for an introduction, but walked straight up to him and shook him warmly by the hand.

To say that the monarch was astonished is to put the case mildly. Bentley was given by nature a certain strength of finger, and under the stress of his emotions was unaware of the friendliness of his grasp, until he saw the King's body twist over to one side, while his left leg left the ground, and his face assumed an agonized expression.

There was no doubt, however, as to the beaming cordiality of Bentley's expression, and the King gave what sounded like a grunt of approval, which might either have been due to the satisfaction he felt at the relaxation of the vice-like grip on his hand, or, as Bentley chose to interpret it, as an expression of friendly feeling towards himself.

"Where's George, Wells?" he shouted. "Hurry up, man, and bring him along."

George had evidently thought that Bentley was courting trouble by advancing alone, and that, in that event, under the car appeared to be about as good a choice of place as was available. On hearing Bentley's voice, however, and thus realizing that he was not dead yet, he emerged somewhat shamefacedly, and at Wells' command took a seat by him in the car, and Wells started slowly towards the King.

This was undoubtedly a crucial moment, for the Isas and even the King grasped their spears more forcibly, and there was a hum of satisfaction as Wells stopped about three yards from Bentley and the King.

"Now, George, you old fool," said Bentley; "there's nothing to be afraid of if you talk as I tell

you and stop gibbering. But, by gad! if you don't, I'll put a bullet into you, sure!

"Ask him," he continued, "why he has come to meet us with armed men, when he sees we are alone and friendly? Tell him that we are great friends of Menelek's; that the car is not ours, but Menelek's, and that we are only taking it to him. Add that he won't be best pleased if we are delayed one half-hour more than is necessary."

Some few minutes elapsed while the King and George discoursed together. "It's no use, Boss," said George again; "he says that he does not care one cowrie-shell for either you or Menelek. He says that Menelek may like railways, but he doesn't, and that they might as well all be killed at once as have their caravan trade quite spoiled."

"Tell him that I am not a railway, that I haven't got anything to do with a railway, and all that I want to do is to get on to Menelek as speedily as possible, and that, once through his blighted country, I never want to set eyes on it again, much less interfere with his confounded trade."

Again George turned to the King, and this time the conversation waxed longer than before. To Bentley and Wells, who could only follow the pantomime, and who at any moment knew that it was on the cards that a full-stop might be put to poor George's eloquence by means of a spear stuck in his stomach, it was a period of some anxiety. Gradually the angry head-shakings of the King and the

surrounding chiefs grew less violent, and some sort of attention was evidently being paid to George's pleadings. Occasionally, after that, the King gave a nod, and his nod was repeated by the surrounding chiefs. These nods grew quicker and more frequent, and even smiles were to be seen, as George, with a triumphant look on his face, once more turned to Bentley.

"He says at the end, Boss, that he may perhaps be willing to believe your word; but that Menelek is a great King, and very rich, and must be very anxious to receive the wonderful fire machine that you have brought over the water. He therefore would be sorry to stop you, but he was told that you were the railway, and therefore he called out his young men to stop you. Now he thinks that if you are not a railway, you ought not to look like a railway, and that it is your fault, therefore, that he has been obliged to call his young men away from their work and homes. He suggests, therefore, that a little backsheesh to himself and his chiefs might settle the matter."

"Bully for you, George," said Bentley, nodding his head and smiling in response to the copious grins of the crowd. "Have you got any idea what sort of backsheesh would satisfy them? Be liberal in your offers; I'll turn the whole car inside out to get through."

Another long talk, and then George, who by this time had quite recovered his usual sangfroid, inter-

preted again. "He values the loss of time of each of his men at fifty rupees, and considers that it would be beneath his dignity to accept less than twice that amount himself. He states that there are present some three thousand of his young men."

Bentley still contrived to keep the smile on his features, while he made a brief mental calculation to the effect that fifty rupees represented a little over three pounds in English currency, and that three thousand three-pounds meant nine thousand pounds.

"Oh, certainly!" he replied at length pleasantly. "Tell him that it is, of course, my usual custom to carry about a few odd thousands of pounds, but this trip I'm travelling light and have not with me more money than suffices for my daily shopping. If a few ounces of shag and a yard or two of bunting, with a few beads thrown in, might be suggested as an alternative, we might come to business. Explain that if he really wants cash, I am going through to Gildessa, and that there is plenty of money waiting for me there, if he likes to follow on."

George looked a little mystified, for sarcasm was usually lost on him; he was hesitating as to how he should interpret to the King's satisfaction, when that monarch inadvertently relieved the situation by an inquiry as to what Bentley had done with his camels.

"Humph!" said the latter. "He seems to have known a good deal about my affairs. Tell him, George, that I have left my camels behind for a rest,

for they cannot keep up with this wonderful fire machine" (here Wells coughed apologetically); "but that they will be here in two or three days' time at the most. Say that I am sorry I cannot stop myself, but that I will give him a paper to the person in charge, which will be quite sufficient to satisfy him when the camels arrive. Or he can follow me to Gildessa and get the money there; but it will be less trouble waiting for the camels."

The King undoubtedly knew that Bentley had camels, though he was in ignorance that they had been sent a long way round. He probably had not the vaguest idea as to what fifty rupees multiplied three thousand times meant in the way of money; and although he might talk big, there was, after all, Menelek to be considered, and Menelek on occasion had been known to turn nasty if his wishes were interfered with unreasonably.

George was still in earnest conversation with him, and at last he turned once more to Bentley and said: "He thinks he will wait for the camels for the money of his young men, but he would like to see his own six pounds now, and the papers for the rest you can give him at the same time; but he has twelve chiefs here, and therefore will want twelve papers."

As to the ethical morality of the remainder of the transaction, it may be argued that a preposterous demand was being made; that the sable monarch was only deterred from spearing Bentley and his companions and seizing the car by the combined

fear of the white man on one side and Menelek on the other, and because he would not have the slightest use for the car if he did take it; that it was his undoubted intention to plunder and keep the camels as soon as they arrived and he knew evidently that camels had been with the party, and were probably on their way to Gildessa, as Bentley was, and, therefore, must pass that way; that there was no possibility of arguing him into a reasonable frame of mind; and, finally, that Bentley was anxious to get to Menelek, and had no intention of doing the slightest harm beyond quietly passing through his country. Therefore the twelve "chits" were duly written on pages of Bentley's note-book, and, it transpired afterwards, afforded some interesting reading to an unsuspecting trader who happened to arrive three days later and to whom they were presented. The six pounds were handed over into the King's own hand, and afforded him evidently considerable satisfaction, and Bentley and his companions were allowed to proceed towards Gildessa, the road to which town they inquired with the greatest care. One more amusing episode occurred at the end, when Bentley, already seated in the car, leaned over and offered to shake hands in farewell to the King. His Majesty deftly substituted the nearest chief; hand-shaking might be a good custom of the white man, but it was evidently better effected by proxy.

"Weuff! We're through, Wells," said Bentley,

as they left the small army behind, though the whole three thousand faces were still gazing after them.

"Yes, sir, but excuse me, sir, I'm still all of a twitter."

"So am I, Wells. Let's pray the road holds fairly good until nightfall, at any rate, so that we can turn off to the right and make for Lassarat or Douanlé as soon as possible. Fortunately I noticed that they have most of their women and children with them, and so they won't move in a great hurry if they do get tired of waiting and prefer to try the bank at Gildessa."

It was nearly midday when they said "Good-bye" to the Isas, and they journeyed on without troubling to stop for food till nightfall. The travelling was execrable, but they were taking risks that hitherto they had avoided if possible, and somehow or another they got along, and by nightfall were nearly twenty miles from the border and well on in the direction of Lassarat. Bentley had chosen the point where he altered the direction on a bare plateau, where the marks of the passage of the car were practically nil, and they had several miles of this before they had to do any more scrub-hewing. The toil was incessant, for George and the one who was not driving had to sit holding each a plank in place, for it was a waste of time to attempt to lash them to the car, they were wanted so frequently. Then at any moment they had to jump off and lay the planks over a crevice, pick them up when the car had

passed, and resume their uncomfortable seats; for long planks are not easy things to hold on a car that is rocking and bumping about like a ship in a gale. This was varied by the car being brought to a stop by a dense mass of scrub, when they all three, with axes and knives, would have to hew a sort of path just sufficient to squeeze the car through. It was only the thought of the Isa spears behind them that enabled them to keep up their energies, and at night, nearly fainting from fatigue, they had not sufficient strength to attempt to put up the tent, barely to light the necessary fire.

They were now without doubt in hostile country, the king of which they had hoodwinked for the time being, and their only chance of safety lay in reaching Abyssinia before the fraud was discovered. In short watches they got such rest as they could until the dawn, when as soon as they could see they were off again.

The whole of that day, toil as they might, only brought them twelve miles further on their road. That night Bentley was roused from an uneasy slumber by Bully growling viciously. He grasped his rifle and sat up, to see George, whose watch it was, worn out, nodding over the fire, which was very low. As he jumped up there was a scattering in the bushes, but nothing beyond to tell who their nightly visitor might have been. Bentley impartially kicked both the fire and George into life again, and then resumed his slumbers.

The next day was almost all scrub-hewing till midday, when they were brought up finally by an impassable ravine or donga, some eight feet wide and five or six feet deep, which seemed to extend indefinitely on either side.

Bentley forced his way through the scrub for fully half a mile on either side in the hopes of finding some easier place, where it would be possible to haul the car through, but could find none. He returned at length and said: "It's no use, Wells; we'll have to build a bridge of sorts; fortunately there are plenty of small trees about, and with some of those and the planks we'll have to make shift."

"Right, sir," and Wells, cheerful as ever, rummaged in the car and produced two axes, and he and Bentley each selected a small tree, while George and Bully, who were of about equal use when it came to tree-felling, busied themselves about preparing camp.

They toiled on in silence for some time, and then Wells, pausing to wring the perspiration from his forehead, remarked: "I'm thinking that those niggers will have been about tired of waiting for the camels by now, sir. How many days did you say you thought it would take them to Gildessa?"

"Four, confound it!" said Bentley, grunting viciously as he plugged his axe into the tree, "and about the same from Gildessa to Douanlé, if they don't tumble to our having changed our route to Gildessa; in which case——"

"Yessir, I quite understand," and Wells, in his

turn, proceeded to vent his feelings on his tree, which soon fell with a crash, much to Bully's discomfort, for he had been complacently snoring in a nice bit of shade, possibly dreaming of a cool drink; and he started up and made a bee-line for the nearest bit of scrub, with his tail between his legs, before he recollected himself and came waddling shamefacedly back to camp.

Just as he was about to settle down once more and had taken four or five preliminary turns, Bentley's tree came down with another rend and crash. This was too much for Bully, and with a growl of rage he started off, this time in the direction of the crash, to give a piece of his mind to the intruder, whoever he might be.

"Seek him out, Bully, you old fool!" said Bentley, beginning to drag the tree towards the donga, in which operation Bully, after a few fruitless rushes from side to side, joined, by catching hold of a short branch and pulling with vicious jerks in exactly the opposite direction.

"No, Bully," said Bentley solemnly; "go and lie down. This is neither the time nor place for unseemly and undoglike frivolity. You shall have a tug of war as soon as we get well inside of Abyssinia."

Bully was hurt, so he walked off to camp and vented his feelings by sneering at George as only a bulldog can sneer.

All that day and the next went in felling the necessary timber and in erecting a bridge which

would give some hopes of being strong enough to bear the weight of the car. It was hopeless to risk the crossing at night, so with what patience they could muster, they were bound to wait for the light. They were all well aware that the Isas, long before this, must be on the move somewhere—they hoped towards Gildessa; but they did not refer to the unpleasant topic. They practically unloaded the chassis and carried the cargo bit by bit over the bridge by the light of the search-lamp, so as to give the car as good a chance of getting over in safety as possible; then as soon as the sun was up Bentley, having sent the others over first, backed a few yards and then made a rush for it.

"Whoof! We're over," he said a minute or two afterwards.

"And so is the bridge, sir."

"Humph! You see, Wells, how right I was to rush it. Well, well, I've seen better bridges, but we were hurried. The great thing is that we are over. Collect old George and the traps and let's be off. No, Bully, thank you, you needn't retrieve the whole bridge; we've got no further use for it."

They travelled on the whole of that day, encountering nothing in the way of dongas that the planks could not bridge, but still some twelve or thirteen miles was all that they had done at nightfall.

They took a short rest and ate some food, and then Bentley said: "Wells, I figure it out this way.

There's no knowing whether we may not meet another donga or two. We've been five days coming this far, and even if the Isas go round viâ Gildessa, we've got no time to throw away. I propose to rig up the searchlight and acetylene lamps and to try and make such progress as we can during the night. We're not particularly fresh, but I'm not just hankering to shake hands with the King of the Isas if it can be avoided."

"Same here, sir," said Wells, so they journeyed on through the night, making even less progress than by day, and startling innumerable animals that they could hear but not see as they crashed and tumbled along.

But dawn found them another ten miles on their weary road, and with a little luck another day and night, without any grave stoppages, ought to see them within touch of Abyssinia.

They were now reduced to a parlous state. Bentley's arm was in a sling, the result of a back-fire that had given him a nasty kick at Marseilles, which had got better, but which he had strained again. Wells had his leg tied up, for he had torn it badly through the thorn-bushes. George was no better and, alas! his spotless ducks had been exposed to sand and wind, even laid out as they were among the packages, and were now mere shapeless rags. The white men's faces were burnt a brick-red—at least the parts that could be seen through the thick coating of sandy mud appeared to be brick-

red; they had been forced to let their beards grow, and neither of them, even if they had had time, would have cared to pose before the camera.

The journey seemed endless and ever slower and slower, as their failing muscles refused to respond, however eager their minds might be. Appetite they had none; they were too weary even to sleep when they lay down for a few moments of absolutely necessary rest, and yet always there was that endless inward voice crying, "On, on!" which never seemed to cease, waking or sleeping. Obstacles that at first would have appeared trifling now seemed insurmountable; the actual dragging of the planks out and laying them became almost a physical impossibility, for the planks seemed to weigh as much as though they were made of lead; their strokes upon the tough mimosa and scrub had dwindled down to feeble taps, which seemed to have no effect upon the cordy fibre; and ever the same scorching, pitiless sun, engendering raging thirst which they dare not attempt to quench, from the knowledge that the attempt would merely add to the torture, and the more they drank the more thirsty they would become. One thing alone was fortunate, the fact of their making a way for themselves kept them out of touch with the sparse population. They occasionally caught glimpses of native villages, but they avoided going anywhere near them, and hoped that they themselves had escaped observation. Bentley felt hopeful that he was keeping somewhere

near the right direction, but steering by compass alone often leads to many unpleasant surprises and to emerging at points miles away from the objective.

On the seventh night, as they were camping for a few hours' absolutely necessary rest, Bentley said: "I make it that we ought to be somewhere near either Lassarat or Douanlé now, Wells, though for all I know, we may already be over the border and in Abyssinia; but I am afraid that there's no such luck. If we don't strike it some time to-morrow, the chance of the Isas being on the way to stop us will be greater than I care to dwell upon."

Wells did not answer in words, but dragged himself to his feet and set about attending to the lamps, preparatory to making a fresh start.

They had a bit of luck that night, for the going seemed suddenly better; they got several stretches of easy down-hill grade almost free from either scrub or crevices. It is true that if tempted to anything faster than crawling, they were suddenly brought up by a bump such as threatened to disintegrate the whole fabric of the car, but they were able to make progress, often for an hour at a time, without leaving their seats in the car. Just before dawn they had a rocky hill to climb, and some places of this required their united efforts to help the engine, for the wheels would now revolve on the dry, sandy, almost chalky soil without any purchase.

However they got to the top at last, just as the sun was appearing over the horizon, and Bentley,

as usual, took out the field-glasses and scanned the view before them. Scarcely three miles away he could see the welcome sight of a railway track running through the valley below. They had therefore struck the railway, at any rate, and were either one side or the other of Lassarat. He handed the glasses to Wells, and it was wonderful what new vigour the mere sight of those parallel strips of iron put into them all. Fatigue seemed to vanish at once, hunger and thirst were forgotten, as they started down the slope at the bottom of which lay the rails. It is always easier to get down a hill than up, and if their comparative progress was not quite equal to that of the historical sailor, who took four hours going up Majuba and two jumps coming down, it was something of the sort, for neither Bentley nor Wells was in the humour to feel cautious, and George's feelings as he howled on his seat at the back were not considered.

They were about half-way to the rails when, with a yell of delight, Wells, who was keeping a look-out while Bentley was driving, shouted out: "There's the station, or post, sir, away about a mile to the left."

Bentley pulled up with some difficulty, nearly ending the trip once and for all by skidding into a huge boulder as he did so. Sure enough there was a building and a palisade, and farther on some huts or tents.

This must be Douanlé, and the Isas had not arrived.

CHAPTER V

Douanlé—Abyssinian soldiers—M. Giorgi—Interrupted at lunch—An annoyed King—The advantages of the telephone—Preparations for defence—A record sprint and a wound—Barbed wire—An unpleasant night—Acetylene a more potent agent of defence than gunpowder—Arrival of relief troops—Wells' first experience of slaughter.

DOUANLÉ was at one time, for a short period, the terminus of the railway, while the portion of the line within Abyssinia was in course of construction. There was no importance attached to the post before this, and once the railway was opened as far as Diredawa, any momentary importance that was due to the transferring of goods that had reached thus far by train, on to caravans that were waiting, disappeared again with the caravans; and except that an enterprising Greek had erected a store, and that a rough palisade had been put up, presumably for the coralling of the waiting camels, Douanlé would have sunk back into what it was before, merely a collection of a few rude huts for the accommodation of the twenty or thirty soldiers that constituted the frontier guard.

The fact that the store existed attracted a few of the nomad tribes, for it saved them a longer journey to the coast to purchase such necessities as they could

obtain by barter; but these customers require no accommodation in the way of sleeping-quarters, and so there is little chance of Douanlé ever becoming more than it is at present.

Such as it was, Douanlé had evidently heard of the motor-car, for as soon as our motorists perceived the station, it was evident that those at the station had already seen them, for the Abyssinian flag that flew over the huts was being vigorously dipped and rifles were being fired. The fact of the bobbing flag and the absence of any ping of bullets permitted it to be believed that the firing was in their honour, and not at them.

As they drew nearer they saw that all the soldiers of the post were drawn up in line, and that they were executing some sort of movement with their rifles that obviously was intended for a salute.

Bentley stepped out of the car and gravely returned the salute, and then shook hands with the officer in command, Captain Makonnen, and with the storekeeper, M. Giorgi; and then with what patience he could muster explained to them the working of the car, for he felt that their bodily needs had no chance of being attended to until curiosity had been satisfied. M. Giorgi spoke English fluently, but as he had lived in Abyssinia for the last ten or fifteen years, an automobile was as new to him as it was to the Abyssinians. An engineering lecture in the early morning, after eight days of incessant toil and sleepless nights, is likely to be as short as is con-

venient, and eventually Bentley suggested that possibly the difference between an internal-combustion engine and a steam-driven locomotive might equally well be expounded after they had had a meal and a rest.

This suggestion was adopted, especially as it was backed up by the offer of some liquid refreshment pending the cooking of the meal.

M. Giorgi disappeared for a few moments, and Bentley was ushered by Captain Makonnen into the store, where he had his first experience of tejd, the universal and sole drink of the Abyssinians, and its sweetness nearly took away such appetite as he had been cooking up for the last eight days.

Captain Makonnen had not troubled to dismiss his men; they still remained in a straggly line, where they were when the car arrived, though the salute had evidently automatically changed itself into the Abyssinian equivalent for standing at ease. An Abyssinian soldier wears no distinctive uniform; his profession is marked by the fact that he carries a modern rifle and bandolier, in addition to the assortment of knives distributed about his person. An officer, in addition, carries a round shield plentifully be-silvered; for the rest, white robes in various shades of dirt complete the equipment.

Eventually Bentley and Wells sat down to a really comfortable and well-cooked meal for the first time for many a day, and while they were eating, listened to all the news that M. Giorgi had to give them. This was on the whole satisfactory, for they heard

that a runner whom they had dispatched to Mr. Vorperian at Diredawa had reached that gentleman, and that he, with his usual kindness, had communicated both with the Governor of Diredawa and with the capital, and that Menelek had given instructions that every assistance and courtesy was to be shown to the travellers.

Moreover, Bentley's camels had arrived the day before, and, according to instructions, had proceeded with all speed on to Diredawa, with the exception of two sick camels which were then within the palisade. This was not such good news, as Bentley's stock of petrol on the car was running very low; but as M. Giorgi said that the note he had received from Mr. Vorperian was uncertain as to his route, while the camel-men were emphatic in their assertions that he had gone viâ Gildessa, no one was to blame. Fortunately the leaving of the two sick camels had necessitated their loads being left behind also, and one of the loads by good chance was petrol.

Bentley explained to M. Giorgi and Captain Makonnen the reason for his change of route, and, although he made as light of his interview with the Isas as possible, he noticed that neither of his auditors appeared greatly pleased at the intelligence that the Isas were probably on the road to Douanlé.

The Isas, it may be noted, are the best fighting men of the Somali tribes, and have particularly unpleasant broad-bladed spears, which are much more effective than the light ones used both for

throwing and stabbing by the mounted tribes. It is the fact of the Isas habitually fighting as infantry, while most of the other tribes are mounted, that at all equalizes intertribal warfare, otherwise the Isas would undoubtedly rule the roost. Hence the evident emotion of Captain Makonnen and M. Giorgi, who did not at all share Bentley's views that the Isas would respect the border-line of Abyssinia and be any more amenable to reason after an eight-days' tramp than they were on the border. They were somewhat relieved when Bentley explained that it was not his intention to delay longer than was necessary; he calculated that he ought to be a day or two in advance of the Isas if they had gone to Gildessa first, and it appeared probable that they had done so, or they would have been at Douanlé already. He did not think it necessary to give a detailed account of his transactions with the King, or to explain too clearly why he was desirous of putting as much ground between himself and that monarch in as short a time as was possible. What he did say appeared quite sufficient, and that was that, having experienced some trouble in crossing the border, he had altered his route and come to Douanlé instead of going to Gildessa, as he had informed the Isas was his intention, so as to avoid any possible further trouble on leaving the country.

Captain Makonnen did not think that the Isas were likely to follow the car into Abyssinia, as it would be evident from Bentley's departure that he

had nothing to do with the railway, and he advised strongly an immediate move onwards, so that they would be able to deny any knowledge of the passage of the car when the Isas came. This would, at any rate, cause sufficient delay for Bentley to get out of reach, for they would be sure to go back to try and intercept him, if they thought he had not already arrived.

Although it was undoubtedly pleasant to stretch their tired limbs on a lounge chair once more, Bentley and Wells were just making up their minds for a fresh start, when Captain Makonnen, who had left them a few minutes before, came rushing into the store in a great state of agitation.

He was followed closely by M. Giorgi, who interpreted his frenzied utterances, the while the poor Captain tore his hair and danced about in the Abyssinian equivalent of what Mark Twain describes as a Frenchman's idea of calmness.

M. Giorgi, scarcely less agitated, at length was able to make clear that the officer's parlous state was due to the fact that the Isas had appeared in numbers coming over a low hill at the back of the store and were now pouring down on the post. Captain Makonnen was trying to explain that with his twenty-five men he could do nothing, and that they all might expect to be killed in the next five minutes or thereabouts.

There was evidently nothing to be got out of the two poor gentlemen, who held on to each other in lamentable and ludicrous panic, so Bentley walked

out on to the verandah and found that, true enough, the Isas were not only coming, but had come, and that the car, which had been driven to the back of the store into the shade, was already surrounded, and that the King himself, evidently in the very worst kind of humour, was standing quite close to it. They had all been running for a considerable distance, and the resulting effluvia were overpowering.

Bentley, with a hurried whisper to Wells to bring George along, hastily made up his mind as to the best course of action, and determined that a bold front was his only chance. So he made his way towards the King, none too gently, through the angry crowd; by dint of shoves and, when necessary, harsher measures, clearing a path for Wells and George; the latter, it may be stated, only advancing as a choice between two evils, for the muzzle of Wells' revolver was gently pressed into the small of his back.

When he reached the King, Bentley once more grasped him warmly by the hand and smiled ingratiatingly, as though he was the one person in the world that he had been hoping to see; but there was no eager response on the part of the King, who appeared to have difficulty in restraining himself even far enough to listen to what George was trying to stammer out in obedience to Bentley's orders.

"Tell him I am glad to see that my runners reached him," roared Bentley.

George translated, and a torrent of words issued from the King's lips.

"He says that he thinks you lie," said poor George at length, when the King paused for want of breath. "He says that it was a lie that your camels were coming; that the owner of the camels was a peaceful trader, who knew nothing of you except that you were a man without morals, and that he had passed your camels going the other way, and who laughed at first at your papers and then tore them up and threw them to the winds, saying that that was all they were worth. That he, with his young men, leaving their women and children, went after you to Gildessa, and would have gone all the way there, but that you were seen by some villagers, who ran away because they were frightened. That you have lied all through, and that now he has come for his money."

"Ah! Some mistake," said Bentley blandly. "Ask him again if he met the runners I sent to him, to tell him that I could not get the car through to Gildessa and that I would wait for him here?"

Again a torrent of angry words followed George's translation.

"He says that he thinks you lie again. He met no runners."

"Tell him again, very distinctly, that I sent runners to say that I could not get through to Gildessa, and asking him to meet me here. Tell him that if he says I did not send runners, he is lying himself; for why is he here instead of being at Gildessa as arranged?"

George and the King had quite a long talk over this, and some of the chiefs joined in.

At last George said: "He wants to know if you gave guns to your runners."

Bentley nodded.

"Ah! then they must have run off with the guns and never delivered your message. He says he will believe you, but that he will be glad to have his money as soon as possible."

"Tell him that that requires talking about, and that I have already sent runners into Abyssinia to have money sent here. Tell him that Menelek knows that I am here, and that he had better draw off his young men to avoid trouble with the soldiers here, who are armed with guns. Tell him that he can line up between me and Abyssinia, if he is afraid of my getting away, and that meanwhile he had better come into the store himself and have a drink and talk the matter over."

After a time the King appeared to think this reasonable, especially as Bentley informed him that he had since learned that fifty rupees per man was an overcharge, and that he had been strongly advised to refuse to give him more than thirty. If the King liked to come in and discuss this, after he had drawn off his men, then they might come to business; otherwise Bentley was quite prepared to wait until Menelek sent to inquire after his car, and then the King could get out of that monarch as much as he liked.

After considerable consultation with his chiefs

the King gave some orders, and the Isas began to march away from the store; but they crossed the border, and lined up about half a mile away on the path leading into Abyssinia. The King, with two chiefs, remained, and intimated his willingness to enter the store for refreshments and further settling of terms.

Captain Makonnen and M. Giorgi now appeared, relieved in mind by the peaceable withdrawal of the Isas. Indeed, the gallant captain seemed even disposed to bluster a little over the crossing of the frontier; but Bentley suggested that under the circumstances it might be as well to let that pass unconsidered for the moment.

The King left his chiefs outside and entered the store alone, to discuss terms and other things. Presumably he was a Mahommedan, but he must have been a bad one, for his thirst was prodigious, and when later, after much gradually thickening argument, he agreed to go and consult with his followers as to the acceptance of the proposed thirty rupees instead of the fifty demanded, and to return with the answer in two hours' time, and took his departure, supported by his two chiefs, his progress was amicable but not dignified.

As soon as they were well away Bentley turned to Captain Makonnen, and asked how many men he had exactly, and if there were any friendly natives or Abyssinians with the soldiers in the huts. There turned out to be over a dozen of these. Bentley, in short, concise terms, explained that they had two

hours to make preparations, and that then their only chance was to hold out until they could get a runner through for assistance. The palisade was evidently more suitable than the store or huts for purposes of defence. He therefore proposed to drive the car within the palisade, to arm as many natives as he had rifles in the car, in addition to the soldiers, which would bring the effective garrison up to about forty, and to utilize the next two hours in transferring as many provisions as possible from the store to the palisade, promising to see that M. Giorgi was not a loser by the transaction.

The next hour and a half was therefore all bustle and preparation, and Wells was starting the car to drive it to the palisade, while Bentley was consulting with Captain Makonnen and M. Giorgi as to the possibility of getting a runner through to Mr. Vorperian at Diredawa, when M. Giorgi suddenly said: "I wish I had thought of the telephone before."

"A telephone, man, where is it?" said Bentley, looking round.

"It's in that hut at the side of the store. It was put up when this was the terminus of the line and goes to Diredawa; but the Lord knows if it is still working. I haven't had occasion to use it for months."

With a hurried order to Wells to drive the car within the palisade and advice to Captain Makonnen and M. Giorgi to get the men in also as speedily as possible, for the Isas would probably make a move

as soon as they saw the car start, Bentley went over to the hut; it must be confessed without any very great hopes that he would get a reply on a disused telephone in the few minutes that were probably left.

There was one little window in the telephone hut, and through this he had a view of the Isas still lined up, as before, about half a mile off.

The telephone was an old-fashioned one, with a bell wheel, and he ground away vigorously before he put the receiver to his ear, but there was no response when he did so. As he had anticipated, no sooner did the noise of the car inform him that Wells had begun to drive it to the palisade than a movement began in the ranks of the Isas.

"I reckon they tumble to the idea," said Bentley to himself, "and fancy they've been spoofed all along." He proceeded to give his attention to the telephone again, and ground away as though his life depended on it, which, as a matter of fact, it did. He rang and rang, occasionally lifting the receiver to his ear, with no better luck than before, and now the Isas were beginning to run towards the palisade, evidently with the intention of attacking it. He had no particular desire to be left outside in the hut, and the Isas would be there in a very few minutes. Still, the telephone was their only chance, for the possibility of a runner getting through was problematical. He therefore determined not to leave till the very last moment, and, if forced to go within the palisade, to use his best endeavours to persuade

the Isas to withdraw again by any promises that he could make, so as to get a further chance at attempting to get a reply. He ground and ground away, and was just about to give it up in despair, when, on picking up the receiver for the last time, he heard a voice saying in English: "Well, who may you be, making all that confounded row?" He nearly dropped the telephone in his surprise, for he had been rehearsing what he knew of Amheric, and had a sentence, such as it was, pat on the tip of his tongue.

In his agitation he nearly began this, but changed it to: "I'm Bentley, with Menelek's car, surrounded by about three thousand Isas, who threaten all sorts of unpleasant things."

"The deuce you are! I'm Michœledis, British Consul at Diredawa. Glad to hear you're safe; we had rumours that you were wiped out a week ago."

"Safe be smothered," roared Bentley. "There's just about a hundred yards between me and the first of a few thousand yelling devils armed with spears, and they aren't losing any time in getting here. Send us on troops quick here—Douanlé, if Menelek ever wishes to see his car. Here, I'm out of this! We'll hold out all we can."

Bentley flung down the receiver and made a bolt for the palisade, about twenty yards ahead of the first Isas, who paused for a moment in astonishment at his sudden apparition, and then, without any compunction, began hurling spears at him as he ran. Whether the aim was hurried or whether the

Isas are better at stabbing than throwing, no spears hit him, although they whizzed unpleasantly near him and stuck in the ground ahead with a quiver that showed that they meant business. An hour before, if Bentley had been asked if he could have walked fifty yards quickly, he would have said that it was impossible in his state of fatigue, and yet under the inducement of those spears, he sprinted that fifty yards in something under record time, and was just congratulating himself that he was within reach of the gates of the palisade, which Wells and some Abyssinian soldiers were holding ready to swing to as soon as he was inside, when one spear caught him just above the knee and cut its way diagonally through his thigh, causing a nasty wound some two inches and a half long. Wells and the soldiers had not been able to fire to protect his flight, as he was running straight at them, and as soon as he had stumbled past the gates they began to swing them to.

"Hold on a moment," said Bentley, sinking on to one knee, while he emptied his revolver at the advancing Isas through the fast-closing chink. Whether he did more than relieve his feelings the shutting of the gates prevented their seeing, and the Isas, seeing that the gates were closed and that the palisade was a strong one, drew off again to consider matters, helped thereto by a few charges of buckshot that Bentley sent after them as soon as he could hobble to the car and seize a shotgun

and get back to the palisade on to one of the boxes that they had ranged along as firing-posts.

They were safe for the time being, and while Bentley tied up his leg as best he could, he told his companions of his successful visit to the telephone, and consulted with them as to the best means of holding out until the troops, that no doubt would be sent at once in reply to his urgent demand, arrived.

It transpired afterwards that it was the merest bit of luck that brought such a ready response to his ringing. Mr. Michœledis, the British Consul, had occasion to go to the railway depôt to inspect some stores that had arrived for the consulate. He had been there most of the morning, and at length had his attention called to the persistent ringing of a telephone bell, which the natives about ignored complacently, appearing even to be ignorant of the whereabouts of the telephone from whence all the noise proceeded. The incessant ringing finally annoyed Mr. Michœledis, and he looked around, until he found the instrument, and as has been seen, answered the call himself.

Meanwhile the Isas had withdrawn to a point which they evidently considered was out of range, and could be seen in animated conversation. Bentley, who knew their nature sufficiently well, was astonished that they had not pushed the first charge home, and was glad that the Abyssinian soldiers had remained huddled up like a pack of sheep in a pen, instead of making any attempt to repulse the attack.

He had no wish whatever to commence bloodshed, for then inquiries would be made and political consequences might ensue. He hoped, if possible, to hold the Isas off until the arrival of Menelek's men, and then they would probably melt away, or, if they did not, it would be a matter for the Emperor's troops to act if they liked.

He looked around for a means of rendering the palisade more easily defendable in case of attack, and saw in the corner a large heap of barbed wire, while at a distance of some twenty-five yards from the palisade a row of posts had been driven into the ground. It had evidently been the intention of someone to surround the palisade with a fence of barbed wire; but like most things in Africa, the good intention had been left for someone else to carry out.

It was doubtful if the Isas would resume the attack during the day, for they knew that the soldiers, at any rate, were armed, and there was very little cover under which they could approach without exposing themselves to the bullets, of which they had had considerable experience during the Somali expeditions. So Bentley, whose wound prevented any walking, commissioned Wells to take the whole garrison out and fix the barbed wire round the posts, while he kept watch on the movements of the Isas. The Abyssinians, as soon as they understood what was expected of them, worked with a will, and before nightfall quite a respectable fence completely surrounded the palisade. The Isas had

watched them working without making any forward demonstration, and at one time had disappeared from view altogether. The reason for this became soon apparent by the passage of a goods train wending its way slowly towards Diredawa. Had the Isas remained in sight Bentley would have been tempted to fire a few volleys in their direction in the hope that the fighting might have been reported at Diredawa by the driver of the train, and caused a hurrying in the despatch of troops, if they had not already left; as it was, he thought it better to leave matters in the hands of Mr. Michœledis, and not to aggravate the Isas by any invitation to begin.

When the sun went down Bentley posted sentries at the four corners of the palisade, and when rations of food had been distributed, suggested to Captain Makonnen that he had better make his men lie down under arms to get a little rest.

The pain of his wound prevented any idea of sleeping, and so he sat on a box, supplementing the sentries, in whose vigilance he had not much belief.

As he sat there he tried to puzzle out the probable conduct of the Isas, and the likelihood of their proceeding to extreme measures. He was beginning to argue himself into a hopeful frame of mind, for it was quite clear to him that the Isas could not now expect to get much out of him any way, and would be likely to get even less, if they succeeded in wiping him out and the frontier post with him. It was manifestly unreasonable that out of mere annoy-

ance at being hoodwinked the tribe should risk a war with Abyssinia. He was beginning to feel sure that they would have dispersed by the morning, when he thought he noticed several moving black patches on the plain before him, which he had not noticed before in the light of the rising moon. By way of making sure, and at the same time wakening the garrison, he loosed off his rifle at the nearest black patch, and the accelerated movement made it evident that the Isas were advancing to the attack under cover of the darkness. Bentley's shot aroused the garrison, and now he had the greatest difficulty in preventing the awakened Abyssinians from firing blindly into the night. Cartridges, he knew, were none too plentiful, and he explained to Captain Makonnen that in view of the evident hostility of the Isas they would probably want all they had, if any delay occurred in the arrival of the troops. He was disappointed, rather than surprised, that the Isas had after all determined to attack, for an annoyed savage has generally the way of striking first and thinking about the consequences afterwards. He acknowledged that the Isas had some good reason for feeling annoyed, and it was not altogether surprising that with him under their hands they should, at any rate, try some reprisals before it was too late.

While the garrison were erecting the fence in the afternoon, he had busied himself with the searchlight lamp, and had succeeded in fixing it on the camera

tripod in such a manner that it could be directed to all parts of the compass with little difficulty. It is always much easier to disconcert savages by what to them is marvellous than by known methods of warfare, and an unknown danger will often act better as a means of defence, although the danger may be purely imaginary, than the most deadly fusilade. He had also considerable hopes as to the efficacy of the barbed-wire fence as a means of breaking up the first attack, and, at any rate, if the Isas surmounted that and they were forced at length to take to their rifles, they were likely to do much more damage at point-blank range than by wasting cartridges into the darkness. So telling Wells to light the lamp, but to keep it covered as yet, he hobbled round and round the Abyssinians who were posted along the wall of the palisade, accompanied by Captain Makonnen, and by so doing prevented them from firing a shot. In this manner their patience was rewarded by their having a good view of the effect of the barbed wire, which the Isas in no way expected, and did not see before the front ranks were brought up with an unpleasant and surprising shock, the charm of which was in no way diminished by the fusilade of buckshot that Bentley and Wells kept up with the two shotguns as fast as they could loose off and reload.

It took quite a time to impress upon the rear ranks that there was an obstacle in the way, and the front ranks consequently had a sufficiently unpleasant time

of it, for their friends behind were pressing them against the barbed wire, and the attentions of Bentley and Wells in front were distinctly unpleasant, if not as destructive as the white man's fire usually was.

The result was considerable confusion, for the front ranks were desirous of getting out of it, while the rear ranks were equally anxious to get to close quarters; Bentley chose the moment when they were struggling among themselves, to unmask the searchlight and raise it up like a great eye over the palisade. What he had expected happened, the discomfiture became a rout and the Isas were soon scattering all over the plain again, out of range of the dreaded beams. The effect on their own garrison was scarcely less, and the men cowered against the palisade and shaded their eyes from this unnatural effulgence.

So far it was a bloodless victory, and they kept the searchlight revolving round and round for the rest of the night, Wells occasionally passing his hat over it, "Just to give the idea of a wink," as he put it.

Once only during the night a cluster of spears flew over the palisade and wounded one man seriously and two more slightly. Bentley immediately tipped the searchlight over as far down as possible in the direction from which the spears had come, and found that a mass of Isas had crept up out of reach of the rays of the light and were crouching down close to the barbed wire, which had again evidently brought them to a stop. The

moment the light was turned on them, however, they fled as before, and that was their last attempt during the night, though they were evidently signalling for reinforcements, for a fire was lit on every hill, and far away in the distance on all sides could be seen answering dots of flame.

Bentley now found time to make inquiries as to how soon the troops might be expected. M. Giorgi told him that it was at least six hours' actual travelling from Diredawa, and that even with the utmost goodwill it was unlikely that troops could be got ready and entrained in trucks immediately. His opinion was that if they saw the relieving force any time the next day they would be lucky.

When dawn came, it was evident that the Isas had received considerable reinforcements during the night, for they appeared on all sides, and quite two thousand of them were lined up as before about half a mile over the border and not far from where the railway line emerged from the scrub. They were evidently preparing a rush from all sides at once, as there was plenty of running about and messengers could be seen passing from one body to the other.

It was clear that if anything was to be done it must be done quickly, for although the Isas were unaware of the telephone, trains might pass, although only two trains a week ran regularly, and although there was no danger of their stopping they would be sure to carry news.

Fortunately the intended attack was never made,

for there were now enough savages present to crush down the light palisade by mere weight of numbers, and the men, who had before this found their way inside a British square, were not likely to be deterred by the uncertain firing of the small garrison.

Bentley kept a keen look-out through his field-glasses both on the massed Isas and beyond, in the hope of catching sight of any smoke that might indicate the approach of a train. It was still early, and there was the usual morning mist obscuring the distance, but he thought he could detect, far away, a thin line of white vapour, which might possibly be a train, though whether the relief train or another it was impossible to say. He kept his own counsel, but this time, if it was a train, he intended that the fact that there was fighting going on should not pass unnoticed.

Another ten minutes made it clear through the glasses that it was undoubtedly steam, and another ten minutes would bring the train itself in sight round the scrub.

Calling Captain Makonnen, he suggested that it would be as well to tell his men to load, and at any movement the Isas made, to begin firing, first at those over the frontier. He told him that a train was coming and, whether it was the relief or not, that he wished to keep the attention of the Isas away from the train, so that they would not have time to disappear as they had done the day before.

On the Abyssinian Somali Boundary.

Troops sent by the Emperor to help us on the Abyssinian Somali boundary.

Nothing loath, the Abyssinians began to loose off their rifles, and if they did nothing else, they succeeded in keeping the Isas in ignorance of the approach of the train, which presently steamed out of the scrub almost in their midst.

It was the relief train of trucks crowded with Abyssinian soldiers, who, before the train came to a standstill, began pouring lead into the serried masses of Isas, doing considerable damage. The Isas, at this totally unexpected onslaught, broke and fled at once, and the Abyssinians tumbled out of the train and fired at them as they ran, utterly regardless of the fact that they were equally peppering the garrison they had come to save.

Bullets soon began to whiz over and through the palisade and Bentley motioned to the men to lie down. This they did, and as the bullets mostly went high no one was hit; but the Union Jack on the car was perforated with three bullet holes and poor M. Giorgi's store had its galvanized iron roof riddled.

The Isas were now in full flight, and the moment the hail of bullets was clear of the palisade the Abyssinian guard rushed out of the palisade and joined in the pursuit.

No doubt the fact of the Isas being over the border justified the action of the Abyssinians, and the lesson given was a salutary one as to the folly of attempting to delay the advent of the motor; but this was Wells' first sight of anything like warfare, and the manner in which the wounded Isas received

the happy dispatch as the Abyssinians came up to them, together with the view of the dead bodies now plentifully distributed over the plain, caused him to turn pale.

"What's the matter, Wells?" Bentley asked, thinking he was ill.

"Nothing, sir; but excuse me, sir, this sort of thing is a bit new to me, and it's a little sickening at first. Eugh!"

"Here, drink this," said Bentley, offering his flask; "and don't turn your head away, get used to it. We'll probably see a good deal worse before we are safely into Adis Ababa."

He left Wells to go forward to greet a group of Abyssinian officers, who had left their men to amuse themselves with the flying Isas, and were returning to the palisade.

The car was driven out for their inspection, and everyone rejoiced, with the exception of poor M. Giorgi, who loudly bewailed his ruined roof. Bentley consoled him, however, with the thought that now the frontier guard was sure to be largely increased, at any rate for a time, and this meant more business.

This turned out to be the case, for the officer in command told Bentley that he had been ordered to leave half his force to augment the frontier guard and to form an escort for the car with the other half, at any rate till they were beyond reach of reprisals from the badly mauled Isas.

CHAPTER VI

Triumphant progress from Douanlé—Wells as musician and conjurer—They leave their escort—A diving train—Negotiating a river—Fever—A sandstorm—George as sportsman—Mr. Vorperian again—Arrival at Diredawa—Official reception.

"THIS, sir, is what I call travelling!" said Wells complacently, some three hours later, as he leant back luxuriously with his pipe in his mouth and calmly surveyed the serried ranks of their escort. "If these military gentlemen had had a bath any time in history, and there was a shade less sun, this trip might have been arranged to suit."

Bentley did not answer otherwise than by a growl. He had spent the last quarter of an hour before starting in attending to his wound, which was already beginning to show signs of festering. In such cases he had one simple and effective remedy in which he had the most implicit confidence. Having first of all with a clean knife prepared the wound until he had got a nice clean hole, he proceeded to fill that hole with almost pure permanganate of potash and then bound the limb up with lint and oilskin. He then set himself to bear the scorching but salutary effects with such fortitude as he might, and

during that time was not eager for frivolous conversation.

To him, therefore, their triumphal progress was but as a pageant seen dimly in an unpleasant dream, and Wells' remark seemed superfluous.

Not so, however, Bully and George, who surveyed the crowd with expressions of authoritative disdain and tried to give the impression that it was the most natural thing in the world for them to have five or six hundred men walking in attendance on them, singing execrable music and smelling to match their music.

The Abyssinian soldier is at all times a cheerful soul and never more so than after a little victorious blood-letting. The car had provided quite a nice morning's sport, and therefore the car and its occupants were to be honoured for themselves as well as for the idea that, if they were not, probably Menelek might inquire the reason why.

The officers had brought their horses with them on the train, but those animals absolutely refused to approach anywhere near the car. The Abyssinian is not much more tender than the Somali in his treatment of horseflesh, and to spare the poor beasts more of the merciless ill-treatment to which they were being subjected, Bentley told Wells to stop the engine, and then explained that it had been found impossible in Europe to reconcile any animals to a motor-car until a certain process of familiarization had been gone through.

He hobbled up to the four wretched, panting beasts that were already snorting with mingled fear and pain, their mouths bleeding from the cruel bits, and led each up to the car, patting its neck and letting it smell the awful thing, while he led it quietly up and down. He then gave the bridle of each to a soldier to hold as he went through the same process with the next. It took some time, but it was worth it, for presently the quieted beasts were gazing unconcernedly at the car.

He motioned to the soldiers to lead the horses away, and started the engine, immediately telling Wells to throttle down to the lowest hum possible. Then he went through the same process again with each horse, Wells gradually opening the throttle as they grew more reconciled to the strange noise.

The first movement forward caused a momentary tendency to back away again and shy, but as the car glided slowly forward without doing any harm, they were soon induced to follow and the promised training was accomplished. The officers got into the saddle again and followed immediately in the wake of the car. They themselves had never been desirous of getting in front, and soon they had another chance of seeing the white man's power over brute creation. For Wells, after his abortive attempt at opening a conversation with Bentley, who had crawled back into his seat with neither his leg nor his temper improved by the exercise he had taken, turned his attention to annoying Bully.

Bully, although quite the friendliest person in the world to his friends, of whom Wells ranked second only to Bentley, could, on the slightest provocation, be induced to give a series of growls, the while he bared a set of fangs that, in conjunction with the growls, were calculated to scare the timid. The Abyssinian soldiers were unaware that this was a little arranged comedy for their benefit, and Wells consequently went up in their estimation immensely, for the fearlessness exhibited in handling this new kind of enraged wild beast.

The officers, prior to starting, had tried to induce Bentley to take advantage of the train back to Diredawa, and he had had some difficulty in explaining to them that he had undertaken to drive the car to Adis Ababa. The value of a motor record did not appeal to them, while the idea of sitting comfortably in a train instead of marching twenty or thirty miles, did. However, they seemed to have received definite instructions that they were to hold themselves at the Englishman's disposal, for on Bentley's suggesting, through George, that they had better go back and leave him to continue his journey alone, there was no more said; indeed, they at first negatived the idea of only escorting him as far as Arroua, where Bentley felt that he should be well away from any possible pursuit by the Isas. Bentley was firm on this, however, for the country was becoming more open and better for travelling, and as long as he had the soldiers with

him they would be condemned to crawl along at a very slow march.

By manœuvring round the scrub they were able to make fairly continuous progress till a halt was called for the mid-day meal.

During the afternoon, however, they came to a dense mass of scrub, that the men might have found their way through, but which completely blocked the progress of the car.

The Abyssinian is, however, never at a loss in the matter of knives, and after a word to the officers, explaining what was wanted, a path appeared as though almost by magic ahead of the car.

"Now we shan't be long," said Wells, letting in his clutch and following the fast-opening road. "If we'd had this little lot away back there in the Isa country, we'd have got here quicker."

But he spoke to the wind, for Bentley had taken advantage of the halt to turn George out of his seat at the back of the car, which he assumed himself for the purpose of improving his Amheric and his acquaintance with the Abyssinian officers at the same time.

They proved courteous and kindly gentlemen, and, indeed, throughout the whole of their stay in the country, the motorists experienced both from high and low the same never-failing goodwill and kindness.

So the day wore on pleasantly enough, till at last night came suddenly, as an Eastern night ever does,

and promptly camp fires were lit, arms were piled, and the small army settled down to rest.

Tucked away, low down amid the bales on the car, Wells had a mysterious box—the secret of which he had never yet divulged even to Bentley. So far he had never referred to the subject after the day on which, rather shamefacedly, he had produced it and said, "I should like to take this with me, if there is room, sir."

Bentley had gathered from his manner that he wanted the box and that he was not eager to explain the contents, so, beyond nodding his head in acquiescence, had said nothing, and had since forgotten all about it.

That night, however, as he was lying down by the fire, gently cursing to himself, for his wound was painful, he saw Wells sneak over to the car, and after rummaging a bit, walk away into the bushes carrying his box.

Presently, above the hubbub of the camp, strange, home-like noises came to his ears, and one by one he saw the soldiers near him get up and walk off in the direction of the sounds.

He got up himself and followed and, after hobbling some fifty yards, he found Wells, surrounded by an admiring audience, discoursing sweet music on a concertina.

As soon as Wells saw Bentley, he stopped as though caught in some criminal act, and got up, saying: "I thought you were asleep, sir."

"Don't be a fool; and go on playing," said Bentley. "Why didn't you bring the thing out before; it might have made just all the difference with the Isas. Come back to camp playing a rag-time or something of the sort, and make the beggars dance, and we'll have a night of it."

That night will appear in the history of Abyssinia, when it comes to be compiled from myths and legends, for Wells turned out to be not only a musician, but also a conjurer of no mean order, and beneath the concertina in the mysterious box, were the paraphernalia for many simple but effective tricks.

The officers themselves, although evidently great people, unbent sufficiently to swell the audience; while Wells produced eggs out of grimy beards amid guffaws of laughter, caught coins from the air and offered them to dusky paws, whereupon they disappeared as marvellously as they had come. Altogether his success was immense, and coupled with his animal-taming powers as illustrated during the day, he was altogether undoubtedly the most important person in the whole outfit.

It was not until the moon was high in the sky that the sounds of revelry ceased, and the plains were given up to the laughter of the surrounding hyenas, who kept up their mirthless cachinnations till the dawn, as was their nightly wont.

The next morning they struck the railway again at Arroua, where the troop train was waiting. Here

they bade farewell to their escort, and started across country for Diredawa, with full directions as to the route they had better follow. They took with them two boys, who were with the soldiers, and who professed that they not only knew the way very well, but were expert scrub hewers. These boys, together with the one camel, which had recovered sufficiently to accompany them from Lassarat, and its driver, made up the party to eight in all, of whom six were human.

The two boys proved excellent servants, and until their bones were left later in the Bilen desert, were faithful and true companions.

Then after that brief but glorious episode began days of arduous and unremitting toil. Scrub to hew, bridges to build, road repairs to make, water to find, vermin to slaughter, of which every known variety seemed to settle on them as particularly succulent morsels. Wells had lost his gay and debonair look again, and sighed as he looked back on those two great days of ease and pride.

The country was now becoming more and more undulating, still very dry, necessitating the carriage of all the water they needed, for although their new boys knew where permanent wells were to be found, these were few and far between, and often they were obliged to deviate considerably from the direct route in order to reach them. The country teemed with game, but though the temptation was immense, they rigidly denied themselves any real sport.

Bentley, however, could not resist two chances of obtaining fine greater kudu heads, thanks to the guidance of the new boys. They saw oryx in the distance two or three times, but could not attempt to stalk them. In the day-time they never caught sight of any lions, although at night they could be heard all round, sometimes closer than was pleasant. Bentley could not resist a chance of sitting up over a fresh leopard kill, of which some villagers brought them news on the second evening, and was lucky enough to get him after a wait of a couple of hours. He was a fine beast, measuring over seven feet. Bentley got another leopard a few days afterwards just in time to prevent it getting Bully. He was strolling about some distance from the camp, with Bully waddling a few yards ahead, when he saw Bully stiffen suddenly and proceed to walk forwards as though his legs were made of wood. This was Bully's way of showing that he meant business, and he was making for a clump of scrub.

If there is one thing that a leopard is partial to, it is little dogs, and Bully would undoubtedly have got more than he bargained for in another few seconds if Bentley had not been there. The leopard was lying down motionless in that wonderful capacity possessed by all the cat tribe of disappearing practically behind nothing, and but for Bully's attitude Bentley would undoubtedly have passed on without perceiving anything. As it was, he was soon able to make out the lines of its body and locate the head,

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and a .303 soft-nosed bullet in the neck did the rest. Fortunately the brute was stone dead when Bully arrived, and Bully was immensely proud of his achievement; but that was the last chance he got of leopard hunting, for he was left by the car on future occasions. As a pointer this time, he had by good luck proved a success, but it was hardly to be anticipated that the same good fortune would always attend his efforts in that direction.

It is difficult to give the motorist at home any real idea of what their daily journeying was like. If anyone has had occasion to try and drive a car through the sandy purlieus surrounding Bisley camp on a very hot August day, away from the road, and found it impossible to get on, and exceedingly difficult to get back; and then can in his mind magnify his trouble, both from heat and road, indefinitely, and add to this the knowledge that he must get on, however impossible it seems, until he reaches the next hedge, through which he will have to cut a passage for the car, getting over and through such ditches and banks that may be encountered as best he may; that, then, in preference to ploughed fields he may take his choice of cutting a path through a young tree plantation with an indefinite amount of thorny undergrowth, and, add to this, the equivalent of a car with defective lubrication, that heats to the point of seizing about every quarter of an hour, for that was the effect of the excessive heat; and some faint idea may be gathered of motoring in

Somaliland and Abyssinia, with other incidental evils thrown in, in the way of racking headaches and every imaginable kind of fly of the most persistent sort.

So the weary march dragged on, ever the same obstacles, ever the same scenery, dreary, drab and dry, ever the same heat, ever the same unquenchable thirst, which it was useless to try and quench.

On the third day from Arroua they struck the large ditch of mud and stones, which had been their objective, and which in Africa is dignified by the name of river. To those who have only seen an African river in the dry season, it is well-nigh impossible to comprehend what is meant by the river "coming down." What in the dry season is a mass of shingle or boulders, with sluggish streams of water running here and there among the stones, with pools at intervals; in one night and less becomes a raging torrent, covered from bank to bank with white-crested waves; then the onlooker begins to realize that the term river is not misapplied, especially if he is desirous of getting to the other side.

They had been told to direct their journey to the point where the railway bridge crossed the river; but, presumably because it was thought to be a matter of common knowledge, it had not been thought necessary to inform them that the bridge existed no more, except as a mass of wreckage scattered over the stones, while the columns jutted up here and there like a row of gigantic ninepins. This led to a

somewhat ludicrous episode, for just as they came in sight of the fallen bridge, they heard the sound of an approaching train on the same side of the river as themselves. Naturally they thought that this train was going to immediate destruction.

"Hi! Hi!" yelled Wells, standing up in the car and waving his arms frantically in his excitement. "Can't the blighters see that the bridge is down!"

But evidently the wind was against him, or the guard was probably asleep, for no notice was taken of them, and the train steamed steadily on till it suddenly dipped and disappeared.

"That's done it," said Bentley; "let's hurry on as best we may and pick up the pieces."

"Well I'm d——!" began Wells, but his mouth remained open without finishing the sentence, and Bentley stopped the car in sheer astonishment, for the train, which ought by this time to have been a mass of débris in the middle of the river, was quietly emerging from the water and proceeding to climb the other bank, as though a dive through a river was quite an ordinary thing. It never even slowed up; no one appeared to notice that anything extraordinary had happened, and it finally disappeared in the distance at the same leisurely pace that ever characterizes a pioneer line.

"Don't wonder they didn't notice us, sir," said Wells, "if a little thing like that don't disturb them. Did you see it too, sir, or has the heat been too much for me and it's what they call a 'Mirridj'?"

"No, it was a train right enough," said Bentley; "but it fairly beats me."

They hurried on to the river, where the mystery was explained. The lines, pending the rebuilding of the bridge, had been diverted and laid on the bed of the stream, which for several months would never be more than a foot or so above the rails. Except for a little splashing and superfluous steam, summer traffic could go on.

Unfortunately it was impossible to get the car across by the same simple means. They tried and succeeded in getting the front wheels well wedged into soft silt at the first attempt, and they spent the most of the rest of the day in getting the car back on to terra firma again.

It was necessary to construct a sort of cross between a bridge and a pontoon. Bridge, because the two ends touched the banks; pontoon, because it floated on the water, and they hoped it would still float while the car was driven or shoved over it.

For two whole days they toiled, and finally, when they drove the front wheels on to the structure, such as it was, had the mortification of seeing the wheels make their way through interstices that they made for themselves.

As every motorist knows, it is a great deal easier to get a car into difficulties than to get it out when it is once there. It was a bit harder getting the car off the bridge than it had been getting it out of the river in the first instance.

Then the bridge had to be reinforced with timber lashed cross-ways, over which eventually they bumped and splashed and floundered until they got the car to the other side and on to the bank, where they were obliged to leave it for the night, the fourth night already after reaching the river.

All thoughts of music had fled from Wells long before this; his box reposed unopened at the back of the car, and a general air of dogged depression had settled on the party. Even the diversion of tying a long piece of string to a particularly smelly tin of bully beef and leaving it till several hyenas were attracted by the scent of the savoury morsel, and then jerking the string and watching the result, palled. In fact, as their nerves grew more and more strained by over-work and sleeplessness, the whole universe seemed populated by nothing but hyenas. Sleep was out of the question, for a deafening chorus began as soon as darkness set in, in which innumerable jackals yelled the soprano and alto parts, hyenas supplied the demoniacal tenor to the contra basso of a few hungry lions.

"Oh, the beautiful peace of the desert land," muttered Wells, and seeing that Bentley, whose turn it was to sleep, was merely blinking like an owl at the fire, he picked up his rifle and pumped half a magazine impartially around. They used to fire a shot or two at periods throughout each night for the sake of the seemingly momentary hush that

followed the bang, during which they sometimes fell asleep, only to be reawakened after what appeared a few seconds by a renewal of the concert.

In the morning they constructed a road of stones at a gradient of about one in four up the bank, and with the combined efforts of the engine and the whole party, supplemented by the camel, they at length got the car on to flat land again. They then had time to discover that probably from having slept three or four nights in the vicinity of the river, they had each contracted his first dose of fever, and that it was necessary to lie up for another day for quinine and shakes.

"Oh, what a happy day!" said Wells, as evening drew near and they sat opposite each other, with their teeth going like castanets. "If my dear mammy could see me now!"

"Oh, shut up, Wells, you irrepressible idiot!" said Bentley savagely, or rather, he intended to say it savagely, but the difficulty of pronouncing the word "irrepressible" with one's teeth working at the rate of two thousand revolutions a second brought such a gleam of amusement into Wells' eyes, that he ended with a shout of laughter.

Bully, who had himself been suffering from a touch of the sun, and had, in consequence, been in an execrable temper all day, woke up at this unaccustomed sound of mirth, and produced three very feeble wriggles of his crooked tail.

"That's better," said Bentley, spilling another

huge dose of quinine into the palm of his hand and swallowing it previous to passing the bottle on to Wells. "You can talk piffle, I can still laugh, and Bully has actually wriggled his tail. We shall all three be fit to-morrow and ready to start. It's only thirty miles or so to Railhead, so with a little luck of the sort we've been having lately, we ought to get there any time within the next three weeks. Shy us a light."

Now this was superfluous, for Bentley had not the slightest inclination to smoke or intention of smoking; it was merely an instinctive action of the muscles that caused him to pretend to light an oscillating pipe with shaky fingers. The result was, as might have been expected, that he broke the match and burned his fingers, and then——

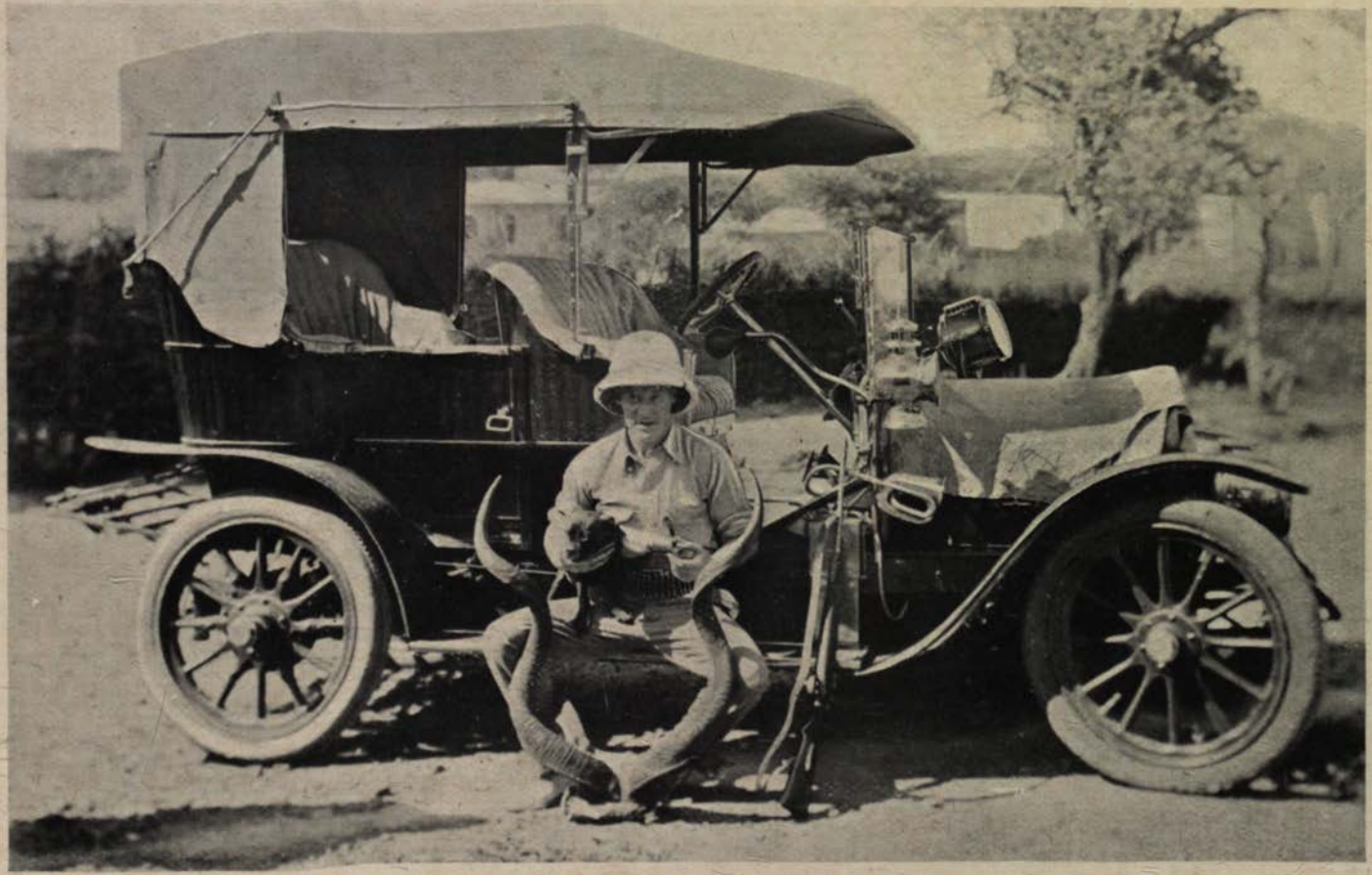
Wells remarked afterwards that he did not miss the glow of the match.

As it was to be a day of rest, George had asked permission to go with the two boys to do some shooting. The boys had been soldiers, and so they were provided with a rifle each, and George was given a shotgun, with instructions to leave dangerous animals severely alone, should they happen across any; and, at the same time, Bentley gave them as much of a lecture on the origin of game laws as he thought they might assimilate.

Permission had been sent him, on behalf of the Emperor as a matter of courtesy, to shoot anything he liked, except elephants, on his journey through the

DIREDAWA.

Car going through the narrow streets. Wells driving.



My first pair of Kudu Horns shot outside Diredawa

country; but he did not take this permission as extending to his camp followers. The delight, however, that a native takes in being allowed to walk about with a gun, even if restricted as to what he may point it at, is such, that he felt that one day of gun-carrying would be more effective in winning willing service than a very considerable amount of baksheesh.

The three sportsmen returned in the evening with a mixed bag, which, except for one item, came well within any game laws that have ever been concocted. The bag consisted of:

One monkey;

One baby antelope (so young that the species was doubtful);

One hawk (discovered in a comatose state after a heavy meal);

One string of blue doves (these appeared to have been the final effort, and were raked out of a tree on which they had settled to roost in lines on the branches).

They said that they had shot the baby antelope, but the suspicious limpness and the absence of any bullet wound rendered this statement doubtful.

George proceeded to cook dinner, and was hurt when neither monkey chop nor baby kudu steak could tempt the sick bosses to eat. Bully, however, roused himself sufficiently to toy with a couple of thigh bones.

Wells ever afterwards christened that day "Black

Monday" (it happened to be a Thursday really); for they were just thinking of settling down for the night, when looking out of the fly of the tent, he remarked:

"It's growing dark very early, sir; I think it looks like rain."

"Rain be somethinged!" said Bentley, forgetting his fever pains. "It's a sandstorm coming. Tumble all the niggers under the car and lash them down with all the tarpaulins we can find, and then we must double peg the tent, and please the pigs it will hold at that."

Wells saw from Bentley's manner that something serious was about to occur, so he set to work with equal vigour, and by the time the storm reached them everything was as snug as they could make it.

It grew rapidly quite dark, and the hissing of the sand as the storm drew nearer was like a dozen hail-storms. Presently the tent, although lashed down in the most approved manner, bellied in to the weight of sand hurled at it, and at every moment seemed about to split into shreds, while the air, even inside, was absolutely thick with sand, that penetrated into the eyes, ears, mouth and nose like solid smoke. Bully sneezed and coughed, and finally, bulldog as he was, crouched down, and gave one lugubrious howl of utter despair. To his doggy mind this was evidently the end of the world, and it was no use pretending that he liked it, for he didn't.

"Oh, shut up, Bully!" said Bentley, giving him a friendly cuff on the head, as he was again opening a mouth like a portmanteau to let out another howl. "It will be over in a few minutes, and if you get that mouth full you'll cough for the rest of your days. Put your head under my coat. That's better."

Bully snuggled down while Wells was sneezing, coughing, rubbing his eyes, blowing his nose, chattering with his teeth, and shivering with his body and cursing, all at the same time.

"They do say, Wells, that a man can only do one thing well at a time," said Bentley, laughing in spite of the tears that were running down his cheeks. "You're doing about a dozen at this moment, and not doing them badly either."

Wells disdained to reply, but his face evinced a gleam of satisfaction as a particularly vigorous gust of sand filled Bentley's mouth as he was speaking, and set him to work spluttering and saying bad words in his turn.

But all things have an end, and a sandstorm sooner than most. Presently the last gleam of the setting sun appeared in full splendour over the whitened plain. They dug the half-choked natives out from under the car, and failing to be able to masticate sanded bully beef, they drank sanded tea, and tried to go to bed happy.

By the morning the fever had broken, but they were delayed from starting, by the necessity of getting

the sand out of the car; and it was not till past midday that they had replaced such parts as it had been necessary to strip.

Possibly as a reward for their sufferings, the road was a good deal clearer, and very little scrub-hewing had to be done. To Wells' great satisfaction they were able to outstrip their solitary camel that day for the first time, and arrived at camp fully an hour ahead.

The next morning a runner reached them from Mr. Vorperian, with home letters, and the announcement that he was starting to meet them the next day, and that there was to be an official reception on their arrival.

Bentley wrote a note in reply and sent the runner back. The result was, that when in the afternoon they seemed to be nearing civilization of sorts, because they met natives constantly and saw quite a number of huts scattered about the distance, and finally struck something that might be termed a road, they saw coming along the road a camel with some sort of a vehicle behind it.

Two hands were waving frantically one on each side of the camel, and presently Mr. Vorperian tumbled out of the ekka, holding in his hands two bottles of champagne and three tin mugs.

A halt was called, and amid much handshaking the bottles were disposed of, and then Mr. Vorperian announced that all the Consuls of the various Powers and all the notables of Diredawa were coming to meet them with a guard of honour.

Back view of car as she arrived at Diredawa (Railhead)

Wells. Mr. Vorperian, "Daily Mail" Special Correspondent. Abyssinian Governor of Diredawa. H.B.M.'s Consul. Self.

DIREDAWA

True enough, after they had gone another two miles, with the representative of the *Daily Mail* seated in triumph on top of the bales, George on his seat behind, and the two natives standing on either step, with the Union Jack and an Abyssinian flag that Mr. Vorperian had brought with him flying in the wind, they saw a huge throng of soldiers, carriages, camels, mules and dignitaries.

The dignitaries were emphasized by flags of different nationalities. Guns were fired in the air, camels coughed, mules caracoled or jibbed, flags streamed, voices jabbered and squealed, and altogether it was a scene of the wildest enthusiasm.

Bentley and Wells shook hands without cessation for about half an hour, and then the whole assembly moved on in imposing procession to the town, where a banquet awaited them, and, what to them was of much more moment, the possibility of a wash and a change of clothes, for their baggage, which had come by rail, should be waiting for them.

CHAPTER VII

Diredawa—A boom city—Atto Negato—Final choice of route across the dreaded Bilen desert—Conflicting advice—Negaris—Danakils and their customs—Evidence of spiteful opposition—Difficulty of preparation for further progress—Off once more—Heart-breaking delays—Crossing the Monkey river—Delay and disaster—The desert reached at last—God save the King—The old musketeer toast.

DIREDAWA is the Abyssinian equivalent for an American "Boom city." It did not "boom" very far, but, such as it is, it sprang to life in little over a twelvemonth. It now possesses a Governor in the person of one Atto Negato, a charming gentleman, rather short in stature, with a pleasant and intelligent black face, who for all his suavity rules the neighbourhood with an iron hand. Besides the Governor and the officers of the large garrison, there are Ministers or Consuls of all the principal Powers, and these have fine residences and personal staffs. Further, there are store-houses, and residences of merchants—foreign and native—so it will be understood that very considerable additions have been made to the erstwhile collection of huts since the arrival of the railway. These huts, with a large addition to accommodate the garrison, still remain and form the native quarter.

Our travellers were received with great courtesy by Atto Negato, and Bentley was asked to furnish details of his experiences with the Isas, in order that the matter might be inquired into. Atto Negato was so civil and withal so insistent that in a very short time he had wormed out practically the whole story. Possibly the matter would have been allowed to drop, in consideration of the lesson administered by the Abyssinian troops, had the Isa chief not had the temerity to send a runner to Diredawa demanding his money. It was suggested that he had better come to Diredawa to fetch it from the bank, which he did, and he was promptly imprisoned by Atto Negato for the offence of crossing the border with troops.

Meanwhile, the serious business of preparing for the most arduous part of the trip began. There are only three routes from Diredawa to the capital, and they very soon ascertained that neither the Tchertcher nor Assabat route was practicable for anything bigger than a camel or a mule. The only alternative was to cross the dreaded Bilen desert.

Suggestions of taking the car to pieces and sending it up in mule and camel loads were declined as being neither glorious nor practicable, and Bentley was forced at last to decide on the desert route.

The preparations, therefore, were tedious and difficult, as preparations always are, and added to the usual difficulty, there was something abnormal about the car, which seemed automatically to cause

prices to swell in all directions. A mule to go across the desert would be so much, but the same mule to accompany a motor-car or go on in advance seemed to become a much more valuable animal. Nor was this all, for as soon as it became known that Bentley had decided on the desert route, everyone had something to say about it, and advice to offer, and everything that was said differed in essentials from what had been said five minutes before, and it was the same thing with the advice. On one thing, and one thing alone, did everyone seem agreed, and that was that he would never get to the other side of the desert. Not that the desert itself offered any insurmountable difficulties, but because of the Danakils who infested it. These are tribes of nomads who, although the desert is nominally in the heart of Abyssinia, owe allegiance to no man, and who have customs which, while being unprintable, may be taken to be sufficiently unpleasant. Stories of the atrocities recently committed by them were poured into Bentley's ears. Quite lately it seemed a French newspaper correspondent had been speared with his companions and their bodies atrociously mutilated, and the cause of the trouble was stated to be no more than offering to shake hands with a chief. There were certain more or less tame Danakils who plied caravans for hire along the route to Adis Ababa as far as Baltchi, but it was the invariable rule of these camel-men to try and diverge from the route into the desert proper, and the unfortunate

DIREDAWA.

Water carriers.

DIREDAWA

Wells, British Consul and self at British Legation

traveller who assented to this was lucky if he escaped in the end with his life, having been relieved of all his belongings by the desert tribes with whom the caravan drivers were in league.

Mr. Vorperian and Mr. Michaeledis, the British Consul, were indefatigable in their efforts to aid Bentley, and eventually, after interviewing every Negari, or traffic merchant, in the place and listening carefully to what he had to say, Bentley made up his mind that, if the desert was to be crossed, he would have to make his own arrangements for that part of the journey. The Negaris were quite willing, for a consideration, to take his goods as far as the Monkey river, on the other side of which the desert begins, but beyond that they would risk neither boys nor mules, especially the latter.

It seemed pretty hopeless, when Bentley had the brilliant idea of setting George to work, aided by the two boys, who now considered themselves part and parcel of the expedition with all the reflected glory attached.

Now it may here be mentioned once more that all the North-East African natives are by no means deficient in the matter of courage, while at the same time they are excessively vain and avaricious. With these three qualities to work upon it is not surprising that, Danakils or no Danakils, men were soon

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Note.—From Diredawa our motorists took a mule ride to Harrar, and while there secured some interesting photographs, which are reproduced, although they have nothing to do with the car's journey.

forthcoming who undertook, if supplied with good rifles, to do what was required of them.

Some even professed to know the desert well, and to be able to choose a route which would avoid the principal wells, where the nomads mostly congregated, and they were convinced of being able to escape the attentions of the Danakils or to hold off such few as might come their way for the necessary few days.

Bentley's plan was as follows, and it was decided on after much thought and after consultation with the Governor Atto Negato himself.

In the opinion of the Governor a large escort, sufficiently large, that is, to fight its way through in the face of combined opposition of the tribes, meant a small army, and although possibly this might be arranged in time, it would mean consultation with the capital and waiting for the necessary troops to be sent down. How long this would take it was impossible to estimate. Failing this, the plan that Bentley suggested of sending on depôts of a few mules guarded by a few well-armed and trustworthy boys, who had been old soldiers, seemed the most feasible; provided that the car could follow quickly on their tracks and pick up the supplies wanted almost as soon as they arrived at their destination. His Excellency offered every assistance in his power. He himself interviewed the boys engaged, and impressed upon them that they were going on the Emperor's service and would be re-

sponsible to the Emperor for any failure in valour or other dereliction of duty. He also placed at Bentley's disposal sufficient rifles and ammunition to arm the three desert detachments.

No sooner did it become known that boys were ready to go, than the Negaris, with an unanimity of assent as striking as the previous unanimity of dissent, deluged Bentley with offers of transport. They were now just as difficult to get rid of as they had been difficult before to induce even to listen to the proposal to cross the desert.

Finally, finding that it was practically impossible to purchase or hire the necessary mules without the assistance of, at any rate, one of them, Bentley chose one whose respectable flowing white beard and honest expression proclaimed him as probably the biggest villain of the lot, and therefore the most intelligent, and after a great deal of haggling put the depôts as far as the Monkey river under his charge, on condition that he helped in securing the necessary mules for the desert party.

Another week went by in a daily warfare with this estimable old gentleman, who tried to palm off on to Bentley some of the choicest specimens of mule flesh at prices that made his hair stand on end.

As Bentley had put in a good deal of service with the remount department in South Africa, he had some idea of the ways of those who wish to dispose of undesirable livestock, but that week added to his experience considerably. At length, by taking to

heart the well-known advice of a certain Abyssinian notable who said, "If you wish to get through Abyssinia comfortably, go through laughing," he laughed and joked with his tormentor, when he would have dearly loved to take him under his long beard and throttle him, and so, at the end, thirty fairly respectable mules were forthcoming and purchased at a price that was not altogether astounding though quite unreasonable.

They had then time to inspect their stores, and here the first and last evidence of ill-will became evident.

Wells, who was supervising the arrangement of the stores into mule loads, noticed that the boys seemed to handle the cases containing two large tins of petrol with surprising ease. He walked over to see for himself, and then called out to Bentley: "I say, sir, there's something seriously wrong here, or all that scrub hewing has made my arms precious strong," and he swung a case aloft in one hand.

It did not take them long to discover that nails had been driven into every case but four, and that, with the exception of these four, all the petrol had leaked out into the sand. Bentley had reason to be grateful for the friendly hint that he had received at Djibouti and which had caused him to alter the denomination and appearance of half of the cases containing petrol, which were now standing unharmed amid the food supplies.

Nevertheless, he placed Wells with the boys as

Female Lepers at the Leprosy, Harrar, Southern Abyssinia. (See page 117.)

Male Lepers at the Leprosy, Harrar, Southern Abyssinia. (See page 117.)

guard over this, while he made his way direct to the Governor and informed him of what had occurred. Atto Negato was exceedingly angry and said that already rumours had reached his ears that there was opposition in certain quarters to the idea of the arrival of the car. He at once sent a special guard to surround the stores day and night, to prevent any possible repetition of the outrage; and he hinted at the same time that the opposition shown by the Isas was not altogether spontaneous, but, he suspected, was due to information supplied from the same quarter, as to the car being a new railway, which he felt sure the Isas would never have thought of themselves. Atto Negato renewed his promises of assistance, and, until Bentley left, both his stores, mules, and even he and Wells were efficiently guarded day and night.

They had, roughly, two hundred miles of country to traverse, before reaching the Hawash river on the other side of the desert. Of this two hundred miles, about eighty would bring them to the Monkey river, the rest was pure desert. The arrangements were that three depôts should be formed in the desert itself, or, rather, two in the actual desert, while the first should make its way to the Hawash river, with the supplies necessary to carry them on to Choba, after the desert was crossed. Two depôts would suffice between Diredawa and the Monkey river, and these were in the hands of the Negari.

Bentley was assured that the travelling all the

way was much better than what he had been through, and that he need anticipate no trouble in catching his depôts up. All the same, although he allowed as nearly two days between the first, second and third depôts as could be managed with the manifold difficulties of effecting a start, he followed fast on the heels of the last desert depôt, preferring to outstrip his supplies in friendly country rather than expose his desert depôts to any extra risk by delay.

The first three detachments were got under weigh fairly easily because the mules were Bentley's, and the boys also in his pay. It was therefore possible to deal direct with them, and by incessant watchfulness and doing the greater part of the work themselves, to get them started somewhere near scheduled time; but it was altogether a different matter when it came to the Negaris' depôts. They were supposed to have been preparing all the time, and Bentley was assured that they were ready to load up and start at any moment, but he discovered afterwards that this meant any moment that they thought fit and not one moment before. Being not at all certain in his mind that the travelling would be perceptibly easier than it had been all along, he was anxious to be off, and he felt, besides, that the longer he stayed and urged, the less likelihood there was of a move. He therefore had a final interview with the contractor and distinctly gave him to understand that if the depôt was not at the Monkey river when he arrived there himself no pay would be

forthcoming, and giving him four days as the utmost limit of time. Without further words he left him and went to bid farewell to the Governor, who gave him plenary powers to commandeer such assistance as he might require from the villages he passed, and also was good enough to say that he would send a hint to the venerable Negari to the effect that he had better not fail in carrying out what he had undertaken to do.

Bentley's two boys had been placed in command of the two principal desert depôts, and therefore when they started from Diredawa the party once more only consisted of four, for they intended to avail themselves of the Governor's papers for assistance, and felt pretty sure that if they were delayed they would, at any rate, soon be caught up by the mules, for Bentley had no doubt that once he was gone the mules would follow quickly enough.

This turned out to be the case, for when they were camping the first night after a fairly easy day, as days in Abyssinia with a car count, they were caught up by the first string of mules, who camped around them.

Bentley sent them on ahead in the early morning, and they were hardly out of sight when he regretted it, for they almost immediately struck a belt of sand as bad as any that they had been through, while such scrub as there was on firm soil was particularly thick. Half a day was lost before George could get any assistance, and although he finally arrived with a

dozen men who were willing enough, the car had to be run on planks the whole of that day, and six miles was the extent of their progress.

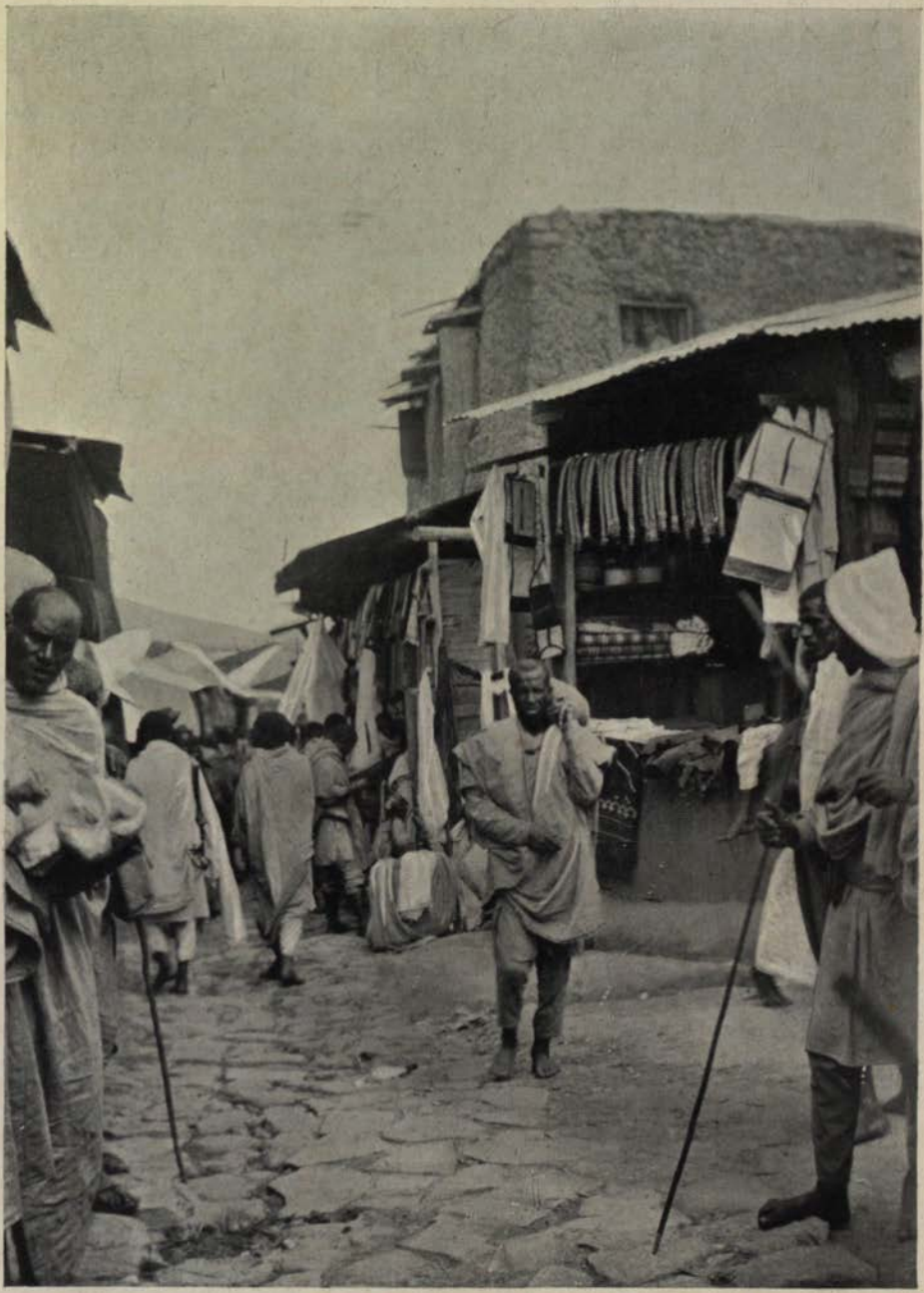
The second string of mules had probably passed them during the day out of sight, for they saw nothing of them at night, so Bentley's hope of being able to arrange some device for towing over specially bad places came to nothing, and they were forced to get on as best they might by their unaided efforts.

That day was again one long struggle with sand and scrub; the natives were getting tired and disheartened, and were going further and further from their homes, and, consequently, got slacker and slacker with their work. George was sent off to fetch fresh levies, and this caused further delay and unpleasantness, for as soon as the complaining men found that they were to be supplanted, they insisted upon being kept on and finally said that they were frightened to go so far alone without the protection of the white man's rifles, especially at night. They were therefore allowed to camp that night, which they did, not from any fear of the journey, but for the sake of eating the white man's food for one more night in addition to the pay they had received.

The next morning, in spite of the new levies, it was impossible to make a start, because Wells had such a severe attack of fever that it was dangerous to move him, as he was nearly raving, and Bentley

HARRAR.

The market place (See page 117.)



HARRAR.

Native bazaars (See page 117.)

had to sit by him the whole day in the attempt to pull him round.

He insisted upon starting the next morning and sat in the car with his head buzzing with the quinine he had swallowed, a sorry object, but cheerful as ever and apologetic rather than complaining.

Bentley kept fairly well, and made superhuman efforts to make up time whenever an opportunity offered.

There is no greater strain on the mind than the ceaseless effort to get on, on, at no matter what cost. Everything in Nature seems to echo with the word. Each moment, whether for eating or sleeping, is grudged, as it might be spent in making progress, however slow, but still progress.

The body at length seems to refuse to stand still, the eyes refuse to close, and the brain seems to work only in one direction, "Forward."

That the advance parties would ever reach their destination was to say the least doubtful: that they would be able to hold out for any length of time was beyond hope. And ever ahead appeared through the scrub mocking images of excellent roads, which they knew too well to be endless stretches of yellow sand. Every breath of wind sent whirls of powdery, gritty sand dust into their eyes and, what was worse, into the car, seemingly guided by devilish ingenuity to every place where it could do harm and cause delay. It found its way into the petrol tank and through the strainer into the carburettor,

choking up the jet and making it necessary to take the whole fitting down for thorough cleaning.

Motorists at home who have had occasion to take the carburettor down even on an English hot day, under a blazing sun, do not grow enthusiastic over the remembrance; but they may be able to imagine the pleasure of doing the same thing in a heat like the infernal regions, with hands either hot and dry with fever, while the body is shaking with cold, or else with sweat pouring down that turns the sand dust into yellow mud, which renders any attempt at cleaning a mockery, while all the time you have the consciousness that each moment lost may cost a man's life, and that life very likely your own.

"Fighting niggers is better than this, sir," said Wells, during one of these enforced stoppages, as for the third time a nut slipped from his shaking fingers and fell, to bury itself in the sand, where they had to dig for it. "I'd like to give some of them who complain of a trifle of dust at home just one half-hour of this as a sample of the joys of motoring."

Bentley retrieved the nut in silence, and as his fingers were at the moment, to say the least of it, sticky, he finished the job, which Wells' fever-shaken hands refused to do.

Despite all their efforts they arrived at the Monkey river four full days behind schedule time, and found the second lot of mules waiting for them, the first having forded the river and gone on two days before.

Anticipating that there might be trouble in getting

the car across the river, Bentley had provided this party with axes, and had instructed them to fell timber as soon as they arrived for the purpose of constructing a bridge. The men had, according to their lights and with misplaced zeal, not only felled what they thought sufficient timber, but had built a bridge; but it had not struck them that it was a bridge required to carry the car that was wanted. An acrobat might possibly have been able to trundle an empty wheelbarrow over the crazy structure, but that was doubtful, and meanwhile no timber was lying ready cut on the banks.

The only thing to be done was to knock the bridge down for the little timber it contained, and to set all hands to felling trees wherewith to fashion some reliable structure that would enable them to get the car across.

An inspection of the banks showed them to be soft mud for some twenty yards or so on either side of the water. The first thing, therefore, to do was to build a road of tree-trunks down the bank on one side and up the opposite side, while for the car a solid raft must be constructed and towed across.

Three more precious days went in this work, although they laboured with hardly an hour snatched for rest. The Abyssinians were divided into shifts and set to work in watches of four hours each. The lamps and searchlight of the car furnished quite sufficient light for raft building at night, while the

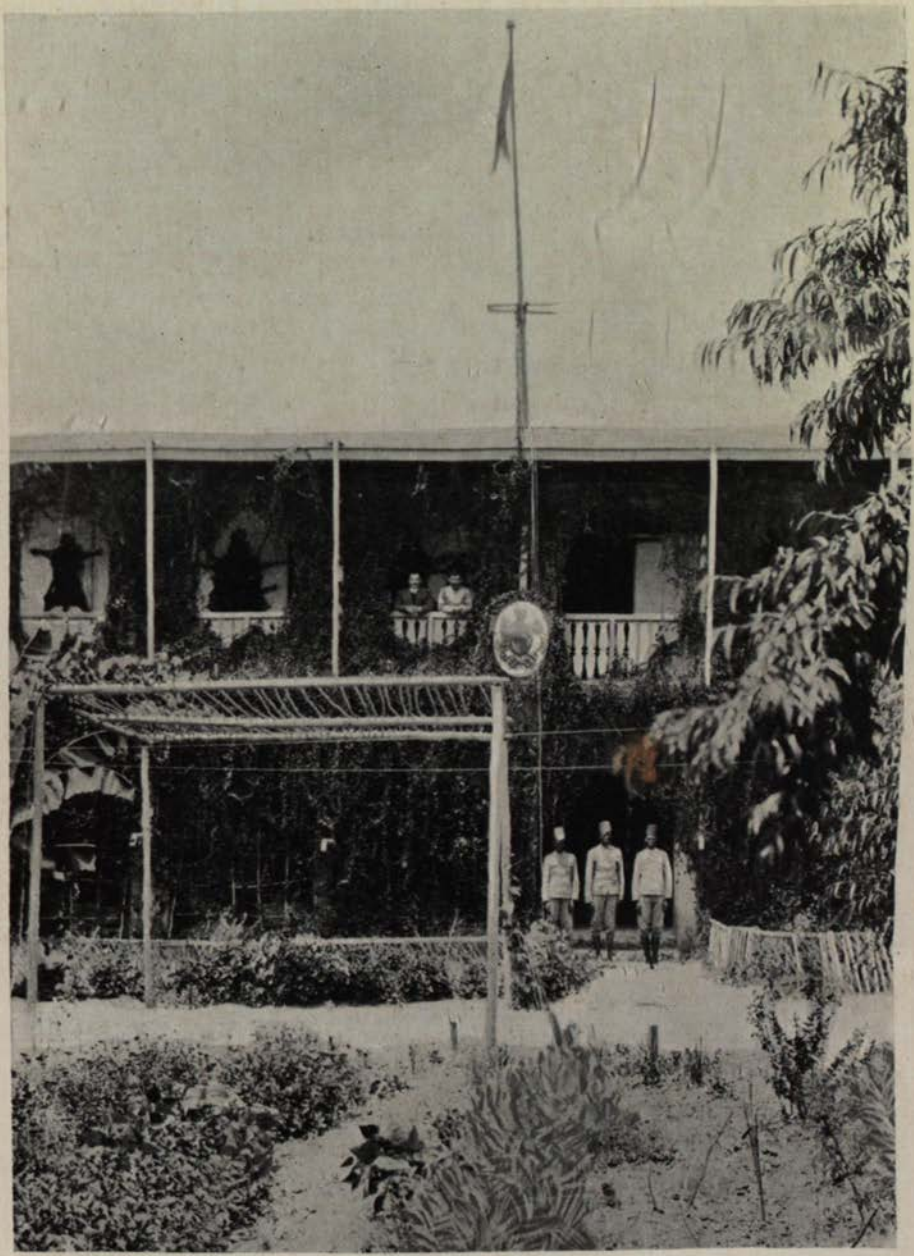
days were spent in felling timber and building the road, to which the logs were drawn by the mules, those for the other side being towed over by means of a rope that they had fixed to the opposite bank. The river was fortunately very low, not over forty yards across, with very little current.

By nightfall of the third day everything was ready for the crossing, and the Englishmen lay down at last for a few hours' rest.

The stir and noise of the preceding nights had kept all animals at a distance. That night, however, while they were sleeping in the stupor of absolute fatigue, although there were large fires round which the mules were tethered, shortly after midnight one of the mules was taken by a lion, who got away into the darkness before either of the Englishmen was sufficiently awake to realize what had happened. The Abyssinians kept up a useless fusillade for some minutes, and then quiet reigned again; but for the safety of their own skins the natives took turns to watch in the same shifts as they had worked on previous nights.

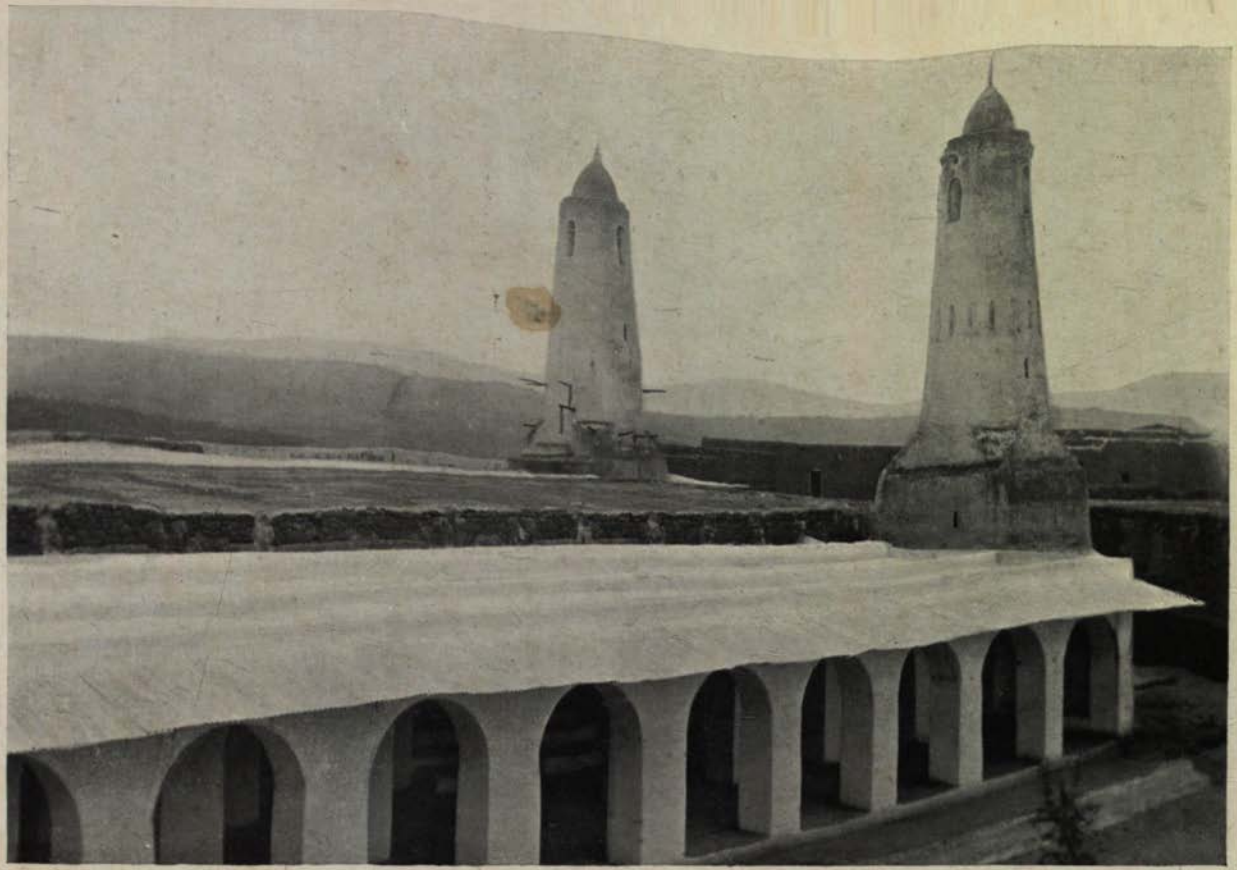
Bentley and Wells were too tired to let the loss of a mule or the vicinity of any number of lions rob them of the chance of a few hours' sleep, so they curled up again after each had taken a further precautionary dose of quinine.

As soon as the sun rose the car was driven to the bank, where the road had been prepared. Brake ropes were attached to two tree-stumps by means



HARRAR

British Legation (See page 117.)



HARRAR.

The Mosque. Photograph from roof of Italian Legation. (See page 117.)

of pulley blocks, and three natives were told to hang on to the end of each rope and pay it out gradually. Bentley sat in the car, alternately easing and holding the brakes, while Wells stood on the raft, waiting to lash the wheels with the ropes that were already fixed to the timber for the purpose.

All went well at first, and the car was got on to the raft with very little trouble. Half the boys with Wells now crossed the river on the small raft that they had constructed. A stout rope was taken with them, the end of which was firmly secured to the front of the raft, while a second rope was attached to the stern to prevent the raft swinging down-stream.

The lashings that held the raft to the road were cut adrift, and at a signal from Bentley, Wells and his boys began to pull. They pulled for all they were worth, while Bentley took a long pole to assist the start. Wells and his niggers kept dancing a sufficiently ludicrous kind of war dance at the other end of the rope, heaving and straining and positively lying down to it, but all to no purpose.

It was all very funny, but there were those unfortunate depôts in the desert to be considered, so Bentley signalled to them to stop, and examined the raft, which had sunk in the mud under the weight of the car, and was now firmly embedded. He found that only about three feet was embedded in the mud, the rest being in free water. He therefore called all the remaining boys and made them lever with poles as

he was doing, while he signalled to Wells to pull again.

Still there was no result, the poles only made holes in the soft mud, and offered no purchase.

Bentley shouted to Wells to bring his boys back for a council of war. There was nothing for it but to get the car on to the road again, moor the raft in deep water and drive the car on to it over a gangway.

The shackles were brought into play, and with much hauling and straining the car was got off the raft and on to the road again, and they were just turning away to go and cut more timber, when they noticed that the road itself under the weight of the car was fast disappearing into the mud. There was nothing for it but to resume their labours and haul the car right on to the bank again clear of the mud.

It was well on into the afternoon before everything was ready for a fresh attempt. Although they had lashed additional timbers on to the raft to increase its buoyancy, the amount of dip that would take place as one side received the weight of the car was still an unknown quantity.

"Shall I drive her, sir?" said Wells, who in moments of danger was wont to remember that he was chauffeur.

Bentley assured him that he would not be deprived of the pleasure of seeing him dancing at the other side of the river for worlds, but requested him not to begin before he was well on to the raft.

Wells turned away in silence and tried the stability of the raft with his foot, and then looked round at Bentley doubtfully.

"It will be all right, Wells; off you go," shouted Bentley, and Wells went, shaking his head.

During the time that they were crossing Bentley made up his mind that it would be better to get on to the raft and risk falling into the water on the other side than not to get on to the raft at all. So as soon as he saw Wells was ready, discarding the brake ropes, he let the car bump down the road at a fair speed. He kept the engine running, and just as he felt the front wheels sinking ominously as they reached the raft, he let in his clutch for a moment, and then jammed on both brakes as the car got well on to the raft. For a moment it was touch and go. The car stopped, but the impetus was transferred to the raft, and the front wheels were within an ace of being thrown into the water as the raft dipped with a splash that sent a cloud of spray into the air.

Wells gave a shout and ran down to the water's edge; he thought Bentley and the car had fallen in. He pulled up, however, as he saw Bentley rocking about like a ship in a gale, but safe and sound on the raft.

"Pull, Wells, pull!" came Bentley's voice across the water, and Wells pulled.

"Now for those wretched niggers," said Bentley, as soon as the nose of the raft touched the bank.

He spoke too soon, for when they had ferried over

all the boys and tackle, and had everything prepared to run the car up the bank road in style, the accident happened which had to be dearly paid for in blood and suffering.

Bentley returned to his seat at the wheel and told Wells to stand by ready to pull. He let in his clutch and started. On this side of the river there was no shelving bank of mud under the water, but an eddy of deepish water swirled close to the bank. Consequently, when only the back wheels were left on the raft, it dipped considerably below the level of the logs of the newly-constructed road. The resulting bump was a nasty one, but after the excellent behaviour of the car so far, not sufficient to warrant the expectation of anything like the disaster that followed. There was an ominous snap and a whir. Bentley, who now was well on the road on an incline of about one in four, felt the car tilt over to one side. He immediately switched off the engine and jammed on both brakes, and yelled to Wells to be ready to pull.

It took the best part of an hour to get the lop-sided car up the road of a few yards, and then they had time to examine the damage. They saw to their dismay that one of the massive spring brackets had sheared right in two, and that consequently the chassis on the off-side had sunk down on to the axle.

This was perhaps the only mishap that they had

1. The Well at Harrar and old Soudanese fort in background.
2. Priests of the Coptic Church at Harrar. (See page 117.)

Hand Printing Press at Leprosy, at Harrar. (See page 117.)

not provided against. In the car they had spare leaves in the event of broken springs; but that one of the brackets, made of the best chrome steel, should go had never entered into their list of possibilities.

They surveyed the car in silence; to drive it as it was was manifestly impossible, and how to repair the damage?

For half an hour they sat with the grim, set faces of men who have fought a good fight against fearful odds, only to see all their efforts rendered useless by some final and unexpected disaster. They sat there, grimly smoking their pipes, which went out without being relit, and not speaking a word.

"This won't do any good, any way," said Bentley, rousing himself at length. "We've got to get across that infernal desert somehow and incidentally save those wretched boys, if they've had the pluck to hold out till we get to them. Come, rouse yourselves, my merry, merry men," he continued, giving the Abyssinian next to him a gentle stir with his toe, for the men, unaware that any disaster had occurred, had taken the pause in the proceedings as a well-earned rest, and were all contentedly slumbering.

They got out the jacks and brought the chassis to a level again. Then with infinite labour they were able to lever the spring back into position after removing the body. They then managed to find a piece of straight thorn-tree of sufficient strength to form a stay, which they lashed to the chassis with steel wire. They then lashed the end of the spring

to this with the same wire, lapping it over and over again, until finally they had completed a job that promised to hold out, at any rate, to the other side of the desert. By the time they had finished it had meant another twenty-four hours of ceaseless and unremitting toil, and they had hardly strength left to fix the body again when, with the assistance of the Abyssinians, who were nearly as worn out as themselves, they had at last got it in place.

"Night or no night, we must be off," said Bentley, as he leaned his racking head for a moment against the side of the car. Bully licked his cheek and whined softly, as much as to say: "Never mind, old chap, you're beastly tired and I'm d——d hot and miserable; but it will all come right."

"Gad! I believe that dog knows as well as we do that we are in Queer Street, and is telling us to make the best of it. Oh! Bully, Bully, old man, what should we do without you!" said Wells, caressing the dog half jealously, and getting a comprehensive lick all up his nose and into his eyes by way of recognition.

Bully was quite content now that the body was again on the car. He had been in a state of nervous excitement as long as it was lying on the bank, as he was quite aware that a start could hardly be made without it, and when he was not occupied in inducing George to empty pails of water over him, he spent his time in wandering restlessly between the dismantled chassis and the body.

Coptic Church at Harrar, built by the late Ras-Makonnen. (See page 117.)

HARRAR.

Horse market. Governor's gateway in distance. (See page 117.)

"Bully, my son," said Bentley, "you are an object fit for contempt and derision, with your sand-caked nose. I should dearly like to give you a bath, but there's no time, old chap. We've got to go a nithy ickle bit more motor ta-ta acroth pitty detherts."

If there was one thing in life that Bully could not stand it was baby talk, and five minutes more were wasted in an unseemly romp between two tattered men and an equally disreputable bulldog.

The Abyssinians looked on in stolid amazement; there was no smile on their lips, no gleam of amusement in their eyes; it was beyond their comprehension, that was all.

Bentley, Wells and Bully finally realized that they had an audience, and somewhat shamefacedly ceased their antics and proceeded with the work of loading the car for the desert journey.

As much water as they could carry was the main thing; second to water was petrol, the means of locomotion; and last came food, in as small quantities as they dared take. Needless to say, the medicine-chest was not forgotten.

Bentley laughingly said in reply to Wells' remonstrances as he saw tin after tin of provisions thrown out to make room for petrol-tins filled with water. "Oh, we can always eat Bully at a pinch. Can't we, Bully boy?" They none of them thought at the moment what those thoughtless words meant.

"Don't joke, sir, please," said Wells, patting Bully, who, having been indulged in one game, thought

another was coming, and prepared for it by assuming the idiotic expression, with his ears back and his tail and hindquarters tucked well in, which was the preliminary for playing "rabbit," but he looked at the Abyssinians and remembered in time.

At last they were off, after giving the boys instructions to take the mules back to Diredawa, to report to the Governor Atto Negato, and to hand the letters they gave them to Mr. Michœledis, the British Consul, for transmission home.

It was close on forty miles to the next depôt, and that the travelling was much better may be judged from the fact that by keeping on practically all night and day, with only the necessary stops to let the engine cool down, they arrived at the borders of the desert at nine o'clock the next night.

"About the fastest travelling we've done yet," said Wells, "broken leg and all. Do you propose to camp here, sir?"

"I think not. We'll just fill up with water and petrol and make a dash for the desert," Bentley answered. "We are late enough as it is, and a few minutes may tell in cases like this."

They filled up and took particular care to see to the state of the lamps, especially the searchlight, and took plenty of carbide. After the experience with the Isas, Bentley relied on this even more than on his rifles, which, nevertheless, were all fully loaded as well as the pistols, and gave them altogether some hundred and twenty shots without reloading.

At about eleven o'clock, with the moon just rising, they were ready to start, and Bentley, after a final look round, picked up a bottle of whisky about a quarter full, and said: "I think, Wells, that the occasion justifies the finishing of the contents of this bottle to the health of our noble selves. Otherwise, I must pour more than a quarter of a pint of good whisky on the sand, which would be a sin, or leave it behind for our dusky friends to cut each other's throats about as soon as our backs are turned."

George, who overheard, with wonderful celerity produced mugs. He offered two, but it was noticeable that when Bentley said: "One for yourself, George," it did not require much further rummaging to find a third.

"One moment, sir," said Wells, and in a twinkling he had his concertina in his hand.

"That's right," said Bentley. "Now then, in style. One sip to the King with musical honours."

The toast was drunk solemnly, and with equal solemnity Wells played and sang. Bentley and George sang too, and Bully howled, but whether from a sense of loyalty or as the effect of Bentley and George's rendering of the National Anthem need not be inquired into.

What followed was perhaps the only piece of sentiment that they allowed themselves throughout the trip. It was unrehearsed and is worth recording. After the royal toast Bentley said: "Now to our noble selves. Hi! wait a minute, a piece of

sugar, George—thanks," he continued, dipping the lump into his own mug and then into those of the other two. "Now Bully joins in, what was it Athos, Porthos and those other Johnnies used to say?"

"One for all and all for one, sir," prompted Wells, and he said it as though he meant it.

Somehow the effect of those words, as Wells said them, was to render those three men momentarily almost shy of each other, and the mugs were emptied in silence. Bentley squeezed Bully, who was standing on his hind legs with his paws on his thigh eating his lump of sugar, tight against him, and then handing his mug back to George, said in a voice a suspicion hoarser than usual, "Come—let's be off."

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

Packing my mules for the desert section of journey in British Legation Compound at Diredawa.

DIREDAWA

Native butcher's shop under tree Car in foreground.

CHAPTER VIII

The Bilen desert—A leaky petrol tank—Road repairs with 105° in the shade—First depôt missing—Wells has the jumps—Skeletons of boys of second depôt all that is left—Work of Danakils—Left stranded—George goes on foot for help—Preparations for defence.

THE land that they were now entering is what is called the real desert, to the north of the Assabat range, at the foot of which mountains the ordinary camel-road runs. Although called real desert, the country is not at all what is usually associated in the European mind with the word "desert," namely, a trackless waste of sand such as the Sahara is. This is desert land because it is waterless and because it is seldom, if ever, refreshed by rains. It is sandy certainly, but the sand is harder and firmer than that nearer the coast, and there is plenty of desert vegetation, dry bushy clumps of camelthorn, and even short stunted trees. Further away from the mountains the desert gets lost in sand much as the Sahara, but except for a greater air of dryness and desolation the part traversed by our motorists was little different from what is called the desert stretch around the coast.

When they started there was very little moon,

and the searchlight threw a ghastly gleam far ahead, while the head-lamps flung their rays far enough sideways to give them a good idea of the aridness and desolation of the land that they were now entering.

With his eye on the compass before him, Bentley sat at the wheel in silence, while Wells, George and Bully were told to get such sleep as they could.

From time to time, as they rolled slowly on, Bentley could pick up traces of the recent passage of the mules, and so knew that he was on the right track. Ever and anon, the gleam of the far-reaching searchlight would catch a vanishing ghostly form, probably a hyena or some other desert animal, disturbed by the unaccustomed apparition.

The going was necessarily very slow, for besides the bushes, although the ground was firm and hard, it was seamed with innumerable cracks and fissures, some of which were almost large enough to have swallowed the car.

Still they journeyed on, rocking about sufficiently to make the sleepers grunt, but never seriously enough to fully rouse them from their torpor of fatigue.

Bentley drove on for three hours and then relinquished the wheel to Wells, and took such rest as he could in his turn. Wells drove on for another three hours without any mishap, and during the six hours since they had entered the desert they had made in all very close on thirty miles, which, considering how they had to pick their way and the numerous backings out of impassable spots, was excellent

travelling, and when Wells woke Bentley up at the appointed time they congratulated themselves on having reached the desert, which had afforded them the best track yet.

Their luck was not destined to last, however, for hardly had Wells got to sleep again, when the engine began to slow up and finally stopped. Bentley shook Wells without any effect and finally drove his elbow into his ribs.

"Oh! My mammy!" he said, yawning; "I dreamt that a helfint put his foot on me."

"Sorry to disturb you, Wells, but I think the carburettor's choked again, she's getting no petrol."

"Oh! dear. Oh! dear. Just the place I should have chosen for a day or two of repairs," murmured poor Wells, as he dragged himself round to the carburettor, which he tickled sleepily. After a bit it flooded all right. "Nothing wrong with the jet, sir," he sang out.

They tried again; the car went on for about fifty yards and then stopped again.

"There's a stoppage somewhere," said Bentley. "We'll have to disconnect the petrol pipe and find out what it is."

"It's worse than that, sir," said Wells, who had been testing the tank. "The tank is as dry as a bone; we've sprung a leak."

Dawn was not far off, but they were none the more grateful for that, for it meant that in another hour or two the scorching sun would be on them.

The soldering of a petrol-tank is at no time the easiest of jobs, and getting the body off again, without any extra assistance, with the knowledge that it had to be put on again after the work was done, did not add to the pleasure of the task.

As soon as there was sufficient light, Bentley scanned the horizon with the field-glasses to see if there was any sign of the nomads, but the whole country round seemed absolutely deserted.

The whole of that day and the best part of the next night went before they had the tank replaced, the body on, and were ready once more to make a start. They had by now given up reckoning the number of days they were behind the estimated time, and Bentley could only hope that the mule parties had been dilatory and had themselves not entered the desert up to time. Otherwise, even if they were safe, they would have of necessity made considerable inroads into the water supply carried, and consequently the main reason for their being sent on would be useless.

The loss of petrol through the leak was serious, they had enough with them when they started to take them across the desert with any sort of luck; now they no longer had sufficient, but they felt sure of finding petrol all right on the route, for that would be no use either to man or mule.

The instructions to the boys had been, that if there was any delay in the arrival of the car, they were to make a "cache" and bury the supplies,

and then make the best of their way back or forwards as they thought fit. Bentley really therefore felt sure that the boys and mules, after waiting the stipulated three days, would have left the goods "cached"; and he would not have been surprised to meet the returning mules. Evidences of their advance were still plain enough, and it was probable that they would return by the same road, but there was no sign of them.

They journeyed on till past mid-day, when Wells pulled up and pointing around said: "This is where they must have camped, sir."

"Yes, I see," Bentley answered; "but there seems no sign of a 'cache.'"

They spent an hour in fruitlessly wandering about looking for any indication that might mark that the ground had been lately disturbed.

It was no use looking any longer, the boys and mules had gone, evidently taking the stores with them. Bentley thought he could trace camel-hoof marks as well as mule, in which case others besides the boys had been there, but owing to the hardness of the soil he could not be sure.

There was nothing for it but to resume their journey, and now, thanks to the leak, they had barely enough petrol to carry them on to the next depôt.

"If the other lot have hooked it likewise," said Wells, in his usual reflective manner, "I'm thinking that we shall be in Number One, Queer Street."

They had a consultation and decided that it was

useless to think of turning back, even if they had felt inclined to do so, for now they were about half-way between the Monkey river and the Hawash. There was certainly not enough petrol to carry them to either place, and, on the way they had come, certainly no petrol this side of Diredawa, or even there; while, ahead, there were, or ought to be, supplies right up to the capital.

They journeyed on the whole of that day, keeping a good look-out for any Danakils. George, two or three times, declared that he saw figures on the horizon, and Wells once thought that through the glasses he caught a flutter of cloth disappearing over a hill.

Bentley, more accustomed to the use of the glasses, had twice caught glimpses of groups of men in the distance, but they gave no indication of having noticed the car.

All along the route, as before, they picked up traces of the passage of the mules.

So, ever on and on, they made their weary way, skirting clumps of camelthorn and dense masses of Janta scrub, dusty, dry and unhealthy-looking, but evergreen in the incomprehensible life of desert growth. Fortunately they had little plank work to do, as the ground still kept hard, and only occasionally they had to bridge over cracks that were too wide to bump over.

The dry desert air seemed salubrious, for the fever, that had attacked them when close to the water,

now left them, and although the heat was stifling they felt as well as could be expected after what they had gone through.

They took what rest they could and even ate while the car was moving, for they would not think of losing a moment by stopping to camp. There were quite sufficient involuntary stoppages, without making any voluntary ones.

As usual, after taking it in three hours' spells through the night, Bentley handed the wheel to Wells in the dawn, and tried to snatch his share of unrestful slumber.

Wells, who, as he put it, "Was getting the jumps," fancied he saw phantom forms dancing up the rays of the searchlight and racing towards the car. He rubbed his eyes and said "Pshaw!" and went on driving. Again the same thing—only to vanish as he looked closely. He drove on steadily, trying to think of something else, and telling himself that it was only vanishing hyenas, such as they had often seen before; when again he saw the flying crowd, rushing with outstretched arms towards the car.

Involuntarily he woke up Bentley.

"Yes, what is it?"

"I think I'm ill, sir; I keep seeing things in the searchlight."

Bentley peered ahead. "I see nothing," he said at length.

"That's just it, sir; I know there's nothing. I suppose the idea of those wretched niggers bolting

has got hold of my nerves, for I've been seeing them racing in panic along that light, off and on, for the last half hour."

"You're in for a go of fever, Wells," said Bentley, producing the inevitable quinine bottle; "have a dose."

But Wells shook his head. "It's not fever, sir. It's just the feeling that something's going to happen."

"Stuff, man!" said Bentley. "Bully would soon tell us if there were any bogymen about, for he isn't partial to them; and he's sleeping the sleep of the just bulldog."

"I know, sir; I know it's me. I'm all of a jump. Do you remember that night in Africa, when you were planting dead Tommies and Boers and you saw a blue light wherever a corpse was. Well, sir, I feel about the same as you felt then."

"Have a drink, Wells," and he produced his flask in silence, and in silence they drove on side by side till the dawn.

All the morning they still drove on in silence, for Wells had a premonition of evil, and Bentley could not help sharing it. The only thing that cheered them at all was that the going got easier and easier as the ground grew more undulating and harder, and the surface cracks less and less. They were now in the very heart of the desert, and the vegetation was scarcer and scarcer, and the landscape the very acme of desolation and barrenness.

A little after noon Wells stopped the car, as he had done when they came to the first depôt, just as Bentley placed his hand on his arm to indicate that he had also noticed that they had arrived at the spot where the second depôt had camped.

As with the first depôt, there were no signs of a "cache," but there was a thick clump of scrub some forty paces off, and Bentley thought he noticed a glint of something shiny through the straggling branches.

He took up a rifle, and was going to walk forward and examine the ground, when, on second thoughts, it seemed better to drive there, as if that glint meant Danakils in hiding, they would be able to put up a better running fight from the car.

He placed a couple of rifles beside Wells and saw that George had armed himself, and then they drove slowly round the mass of scrub.

"My God! Poor beggars!" cried Bentley; for, as they rounded the scrub, they could see the fast-bleaching skeletons of quite a number of men, that showed that their boys had at any rate died fighting. All around amidst the skeletons were the stores and petrol and water-tins pierced through and through with spear-thrusts and battered out of shape.

Their situation was now sufficiently desperate, for they were evidently in touch with the savages, whose handiwork they saw before them; they had very little water and practically no petrol left in the

car; and were still a good forty miles from the Hawash river.

It was no use stopping there, and so they resumed their seats in the car, determined to go on as long as the few cupfuls that still remained in the tank allowed them to do so.

Never was petrol more carefully nursed. The country was, as has been said, more undulating, and the reaching of the top of a rise was the signal for the immediate stopping of the engine, and then they all three pushed the car along wherever there was the slightest downward gradient, only starting the engine again when they could no longer move the weight.

In this manner, keeping a good look-out for Danakils all the time, they made nearly fifteen miles before the engine finally stopped and they could go no further.

Night was already closing in and Bentley, who had been thinking hard as to what had better be done, now declared that the only practicable course to follow would be for one of them to proceed on foot to the Hawash river, where no doubt the depôt would still be, and try to return with a mule-load of petrol. He explained that there did not seem much choice as to the danger, as the chances of being wiped out were about equal for the one who went or for those who stayed by the car.

George volunteered to go, as he was much more likely to get through, especially if he got himself

up as much like a Danakil as the resources of the car would allow; besides, he was the best walker and could, if necessity arose, speak the language, and possibly would be let through as having nothing worth taking. He even wanted to start without a rifle, but Bentley would not hear of this, saying that he could hide it if he wished to appear unarmed if caught by the Danakils, but that it might be useful for protection from wild beasts and even enable him to get through if he met only one or two of the savages.

So George rigged himself up, with the assistance of some dirty calico, into a very fair resemblance of a Danakil, and carrying a water-bottle and the much-prized rifle, stepped out into the growing darkness and Bentley and Wells turned their attention to making as much of a fortress of the car as was possible.

They first of all set to work to dig a pit a little smaller than the wheel base, nearly five feet deep, and into this they put all the water tanks and food cases. They lit no light, trusting that as yet they had not been seen, and scaring the hyenas that came prowling around with spade-fulls of earth, for the hyena, although gifted with the most powerful jaws in creation, has not a heart to match.

When the moon rose, their work was easier, and before morning the pit was ready and the car dragged over it.

With eleven magazine rifles leaning against the

sides of the pit and half a dozen heavy Colt revolvers within reach, they felt that from the inside of the pit they could put up a defence as long as ammunition and stores held out, and they waited with a certain equanimity for what the day would bring forth.

It would be two days at least before George could get back and the pit was likely to prove fairly oven-like in the sun, but at any rate it was a rest, and, provided that George could get back, all might still go well.

They were deeply grieved at the fate of their boys, especially of the leader, who had been with them so long. They were almost inclined to hope that it might come to fighting, once the car had got legs again, if only that they might give the Danakils a lesson that the white man's servants were not to be speared with impunity. Until the arrival of George, however, they felt that the less they saw of the nomads the more convenient it would be.

CHAPTER IX

Stranded in the desert—First view of Danakils—George returns without help—Leaves again for Choba—Wells' mannikin—Surgery and witchcraft—No news of George—Gradual starvation—The last cup of water.

IT transpired afterwards that if the boys with the mules had kept two or three miles farther north, they would in all probability have passed through the desert without any mishap. The Danakils never willingly stray far from the few permanent wells that have been dug in the desert from time immemorial, and there is always a tribe of them in the vicinity of each well. From time to time they shift from one well to another, but there are clearly defined routes between the wells, and it is very seldom that they diverge from these routes.

It was the knowledge of this that had induced the boys to go and had also given the Governor of Diredawa, Atto Negato, reason to hope that by keeping away from the wells the party might get through. Evidently the mule parties had made an error of direction, and had either passed too close to a well, or had been seen by some of the nomads as they were traversing one of their known routes, which the boys must have skirted too closely.

Bentley hoped that the latter was the case, as then the boys had probably been followed, speared, and their goods looted, and the nomads would have then gone on to their well, and were by this time very likely twenty or thirty miles away.

He was right in his surmise that the boys had been seen by a travelling band of Danakils; but what he did not know was that the destination of the band that had surprised the boys was very much the same as that of the boys themselves, and that after spearing the Abyssinians, they had resumed their journey only about three miles to the south of the track that the car had followed, and were then encamped at the last well before the Hawash river was reached.

It had fortunately been almost dark when they finally had to stop for want of petrol, and they had not lit the lamps at all during the night. Three miles is a fairly long way in a desert, and consequently the whole of the first day they remained unperceived, and flattered themselves that they were well out of touch with any savages, and could await the return of George with equanimity.

They did not care to light the lamps, however, at night, although they kept the searchlight ready in the event of any nightly visitors. They were now only some twenty miles or so from the Hawash, and, therefore, well within the radius of the prowlings of nocturnal animals. The result of showing no light was that they were simply surrounded by hyenas almost as soon as the sun had gone down.

As usual, they had been obliged to throw away any tins that had been opened, for whatever they could not finish at a meal invariably turned putrid within an hour. Hyenas are partial to anything in the last stages of decomposition, and were soon quarrelling and fighting among themselves over the tins; and if they had remained satisfied with the tins, all might have gone well, except that sleep was out of the question, owing to the pandemonium. But they evidently smelt more eatables in the car, and the absence of light and quietness of the watchers soon emboldened them, and in a very short time they would have been into the pit itself, for one of them actually bit savagely at the spade that Wells waved at them to scare them off.

Bentley then, reluctant as he was to make a noise, was compelled to fire; there was a yowl and a momentary scattering, but the brutes soon returned, and, from the rending and tearing and fighting, were evidently disposing of the carcase of the one shot.

Three times during the night they were compelled to fire, and Bentley thought that after all it was a good thing, for they would know for certain the next day if there were any Danakils about or not.

The dawn brought no sign of them, and they were just thinking of getting out of the pit and putting up the tent, for the accommodation afforded by the pit was not great, when they saw twenty or thirty savages suddenly appear on a slight rise about a hundred yards away from the car.

They were evidently puzzled by the sight of the motionless and seemingly abandoned car, for the Englishmen kept quiet in the pit.

Whether it had dropped from the sky, or was a new kind of wild beast asleep, they considered it better left alone at a safe distance; for during the whole day, although at times their numbers were considerably augmented, they never came nearer than a hundred yards, and disappeared finally about an hour before sunset.

It was well that they did, for scarcely had the last one vanished, than George was seen coming from the other direction; but it was George alone, without any mule. He came along with the slouching stride of the native, that covers the ground faster than a horse can walk, and very soon was pouring his tale of woe into the ears of his disheartened listeners.

There were no signs of the depôt or a cache at the Hawash river either. He might have been back before, but he had wandered for miles along the banks, thinking perhaps that the boys might have shifted their camping-ground; but only in the one place could he discover signs where they had camped, and they had evidently forded the river and gone off to Choba, thinking it useless to wait any longer.

This was indeed fatal news, for Choba was nearly ninety miles away, or a good four days of forced marching both there and back. George was fairly tired, for he had taken little rest in the last day and night, and yet their only chance of succour lay

in his being able to reach Choba in time to send them back assistance. He said that a couple of hours' rest was all that he required, and that, at any rate, now that the Danakils knew of the existence of the car, he had much better be off again at once, before the car was surrounded, as it probably would be the next day.

Bentley told him to eat and then lie down and rest, while he wrote a full account of their position for transmission to the capital, if George was unable to obtain the necessary assistance at Choba. The good fellow had brought his water skin full, and also a couple of gourds-full of water to augment their store; and when he woke, positively refused to take either water or provisions, saying that he would be able to obtain both beyond the Hawash, where he would be easily in the morning. This time he made no bones, however, about taking the rifle, and once more he started on his perilous journey into the darkness.

The two men watched him go without speaking; they then turned back to the car, with the prospect of ten days at the very least to wait. Bentley proposed taking an inventory of their stores and water; but Wells, who had been busy all day, while Bentley had kept watch, said that he had something to attend to first with regard to the hyenas. He lit a lamp and wandered about twenty yards from the car, followed by Bully; while Bentley, who was too preoccupied by his thoughts of the last

letters that he had sent home by George, and which were probably the last that anyone would ever hear of them, to pay attention to what he was doing, went back into the pit and began preparing such supper as they dare indulge in.

If he had troubled to look, he would have seen that Wells was carrying in his arms a fearsome-looking object that was nearly driving Bully wild with mingled rage and fright.

On to the handle of one of the shovels he had nailed the best pair of kudu horns, and round the mask of the skull he had fashioned out of shredded rope a most ferocious beard. A stick nailed cross-ways served for shoulders, and after he had driven the shovel firmly into the ground, it was seen that, by pulling a cord, skinny arms waved frantically beneath flowing white robes, the while the spare horn, which was fastened somewhere in the creature's anatomy, gave out grunting bleats.

Bully had followed Wells and watched the erecting of the figure with all his hair on end; but when Wells turned the lamp on to the figure and gave a trial pull to the string, it was too much for him, and he returned to the car with his tail between his legs and jumped into the pit on to Bentley's back, as he was opening a tin of sardines.

"Hi! Bully man, you nearly made me cut my hand off. What in the name of fortune is the matter?" he cried, seizing a rifle and looking out. "Hi! Wells, Bully is scared to death about some-

thing. What's the matter? Oh! you idiot of idiots!" he continued, as he saw the waving figure by the light of Wells' lamp. "Have you no respect for the gravity of circumstances?"

Wells answered by pulling the string vigorously, and Bentley laughed till he sat down on the tin-opener, which made him rise suddenly and bang his head against the axle.

"Wells," he howled, "if you don't stop, I'll shoot you!"

"Right, sir," answered Wells pleasantly. "Only I want a little sleep to-night, and if this little arrangement has such an effect upon a civilized dog, it will probably scare our friends of last night a bit. What do you think?" and he pulled the string several times rapidly in succession.

"It will probably scare more than hyenas," admitted Bentley. "It certainly is a magnificent bogyman. If we can persuade the Danakils that he is the spirit of the car, they'll probably give us a wide berth."

They ate their meagre meal washed down with an infinitesimal amount of water, for they had already put themselves on quarter rations; and then, after supper, on making an inventory of their stores, found that, as Wells put it, "By existing on the smell of an oil rag," they had barely enough food to keep them alive for ten days, which was the very earliest that they could expect the return of George, even if he had no difficulty at Choba.

They had more water than food, but they had decided to make use of the searchlight as a further means of mystifying the Danakils, and this meant the use of water; even allowing for that, they were likely to suffer more from hunger than from thirst if succour was unduly delayed.

However, it was no use anticipating evil, and they soon had the satisfaction of seeing the effect of the "*Deus ex machina*," as they christened the mannikin, on the hyenas. They had lit the search-lamp, but kept it masked on the tripod, that they had used so successfully with the Isas, until they were well surrounded by hyenas. Then Bentley directed the rays on to the mannikin while Wells manipulated the string.

There were no more hyenas that night, and they each got a comfortable sleep in turn, while the other sat by the searchlight swinging its rays round and round.

The Danakils appeared again on the same hill as soon as it was light, and, as Wells remarked, they evidently had not much to occupy their time, for they stood there the whole day watching, and in the evening went away as before. This time they did not all go, however, for a few of the bolder spirits had evidently been exercised as to the revolving light, for when they lit the lamp and cast its rays on to the hill, they saw several forms skedaddling out of the way of the beams as fast as their legs would take them.

Bentley now felt that they had inspired enough awe to make it safe to erect the tent, and this they did, taking the precaution, however, of so arranging the pole that by pulling a rope it would collapse and thus leave them an unimpeded view from the pit.

They had the tent up before the Danakils appeared as usual on the hills. The sight of such a familiar object as a tent seemed to reassure them a little, for they came a little nearer, but never less than fifty or sixty yards, and they made no attempt at conversation by signs, but merely walked about and gazed as they had done before.

"This is getting a bit nervy," said Wells at last. "I begin to wish that the blighters would make a move one way or another."

Bentley, on the contrary, was quite satisfied with things as they were. The next day, as they now had grown accustomed to having all their actions watched, Bentley was sitting by the tent, dressing the wound in his leg, which refused to heal properly. He had just finished tying it up again, when Wells sang out: "Look out, sir, here they come at last!"

"Into the pit and down with the tent," said Bentley, suiting action to words, and taking a header into the pit, from whence he pulled the rope, so that the tent, although on the other side of the car from the savages, could not afford them cover for an approach from the back.

"If we were heroes, Wells, no doubt we should have stood our ground; as it is, I think we'll burrow

in safety here and try the effect of a little combined mannikin and horn. They don't seem to have seen the '*Deus*' yet."

"Oh, yes, they have, sir," answered Wells, whose post under the car gave him a better view of the mannikin. "There's a little lot just beginning spear practice at him."

He gave three vicious jerks at the cord, which had the effect of stampeding the spear-throwers; and while the others were all looking affrightedly at the fearsome, seemingly-living, bleating thing, Bentley sent out a series of deafening roars from the big horn.

"Excuse my smiling," said Wells, "I believe these fellers are better sprinters than the Isas."

The Danakils did not stop at their usual hill, but disappeared altogether for the day, and not one of them put in an appearance the whole of the next day. The combination of the searchlight, the disappearing tent, the mannikin and the horn, had evidently been too much for them, and the Englishmen were beginning to hope that they had seen the last of them.

On the third day, however, they appeared again, but this time they came only to the number of about twenty, and they were half carrying, half supporting an aged savage, who, when they came nearer, could be seen to have a fearful wound in his leg.

Old as he was, he was evidently a chief, from the trouble they were taking with him, otherwise he

would probably have been put out of his misery long before this.

They stopped about ten yards from the car, and then began making signs, pointing to Bentley's tied-up leg and then to the wound on the old chief. It was quite clear that they were inviting Bentley to cure it, and he determined to have a try.

He beckoned to them to come forward, and told Wells to bring the medicine-chest and some strong permanganate of potash. When at his instructions they had lain the old man down, and he stooped to examine the wound, he saw that if he was to do any good, quite a lot of carving into the old chief's flesh would have to be done first, for there were evident signs of mortification already setting in. This was a ticklish job, for he had no idea how the savages, or the old man himself, would take the sight of his beginning to operate.

However, he washed the wound carefully first of all, and then nodding to the old man, he produced his knife and made signs that he must cut. The old fellow nodded back, and Bentley set to work. There was no doubt as to the old man's grit, for Bentley must have hurt him severely, as he was not taking any risks about leaving any bad flesh to retard the cure, and the old chief never winced once. Finally Bentley poured in permanganate of potash, even stronger than he was accustomed to use on himself, and then bound up the wound tightly.

It was inadvisable that the old man should attempt to walk away, as it would probably shift the bandage, so after some consultation with Wells, the latter produced a slip of sailcloth, which they had by them for the purpose of patching the tent, and Bentley put this on the ground by the old chief and signed to him to lie down on it. Then he and Wells made a sort of hammock and showed the savages how to carry it. Bentley then pointed in the direction from which they had come, and then to the sun, then to the ground, and then made a motion with his hand upwards and finished by beckoning.

The Danakils watched him, and after he had finished, went through a somewhat similar pantomime themselves. First, they pointed to the old chief and away, then to the sun, and made the action of setting and rising, and then walked away a little and came back, pointing again to the old chief.

Bentley felt that he had been understood, and that they would bring the old man back the next day; so he nodded his head and signed to them to be off. They went away, quite peaceably, carrying the old chief with them.

"If we have any luck, and the old chap gets better, which I have reason to hope he will, or he ought to have died long ago from blood-poisoning, I think we shall have done the trick, if there is any gratitude in these niggers, which I doubt," Bentley said, as they watched the retreating forms of the savages.

The uncertainty as to the conduct of the Danakils prevented them feeling the monotony of their existence, but it did not make them any more appreciative of the diet that they were reduced to. No longer could they allow themselves the luxury of throwing away tainted tins; they were reduced to boiling the taint out of them, as Wells put it. They made a pot and kept it always on the stew, and into it everything went, immediately it was opened. From this pot they helped themselves more and more sparingly as the contents grew more and more distasteful.

Bentley had hopes that if the operation on the old chief proved successful, he would be able to barter some goods for an animal of any sort that they could slaughter and cut into biltong, or meat dried in the sun; but all that he had heard of the Danakils and their ways rendered this exceedingly doubtful.

They waited with some anxiety the next day for the reappearance of their patient, for it was quite on the cards that Bentley's carving might, in spite of the permanganate of potash, have only served to accelerate blood-poisoning, in which case all the blame would be sure to be put down to them.

They were relieved to see him come hobbling over the rise, almost unaided by his entourage. He came up smiling and bobbing his head and promptly lay down and extended his leg triumphantly to Bentley, who took off the bandages and found the

wound already beginning to heal, in the marvellous manner that all native flesh seems to do.

He contented himself with pouring more permanganate into the wound and binding it up again, the old man seeming rather disappointed than otherwise that there was no more carving to be done.

This time Bentley did not send them away at once, but produced from his pocket a small mirror, one of a lot that had been sent with them by the Vacuum Oil Company as an advertisement. The old chief was immensely astonished at being able to see his face, and kept looking behind the glass much as a monkey would do. He then showed the marvellous thing to his followers, and, finally, on Bentley's signing to him that he might keep it, for he felt there was not the slightest chance of his getting it back, even if he had wanted it, he tucked it away in his robes with a grunt of satisfaction.

Bentley tried to improve the occasion by imitating the action of drinking, and then pointing away and beckoning. The old chief nodded, and then waited complacently.

"The old Geezer thinks you've offered him a drink," said Wells with a chuckle; but Wells was wrong, for circumstances afterwards proved that Bentley's pantomime had been understood, and that the savages were merely waiting for more marvels. But Bentley thought he had done enough for one day, and so he made an authoritative gesture of dismissal, and at the same time went through the

same performance that had been successful the day before in getting rid of them.

Before sundown Wells suddenly cried out, "Gee wizz! Give me my motor goggles—the smoked ones."

Bentley looked up and saw four or five young girls, two of whom carried small pots, approaching the tent.

They were entirely innocent of clothing, hence the remark of the shy Wells for his motor-goggles.

He picked up his concertina and softly crooned some song that began, "Put Me among the Girls," and then inquired of Bentley what he thought the London cab-horses would say.

But Bentley was more interested in the contents of the pots than in Wells' facetiousness, and he found that they contained milk, not of the freshest, but still milk, and it was no doubt a kind intention of the old chief.

He chucked the maidens under the chin, and they wriggled and giggled and seemed none too keen to go away from the camp.

"Hi! Wait a bit," said Wells, as at length they turned to go, and he handed one of the girls another of the little Vacuum Oil mirrors. "There, you daughters of Eve, go and learn one of the vices of the West."

The girls went off quite happy, looking over each other's shoulders at the mirror, while Wells, who still had his concertina handy, began to sing, "It's no matter what yer dew, if your 'art be only trew";

but Bentley and Bully remarked that they could suffer his music for the general good, but not as delectation.

Wells retaliated with a few groans and squeaks, which constituted his famous imitation of the Scottish bagpipes, and which had the effect of transfixing Bully to any spot on which he might be at the moment standing, the while he lifted up his head and gave out a lugubrious wail that endured as long as the music continued.

"We've had quite an exciting day," said Wells, as they sat discussing a dinner of two mouldy sardines each, carefully spread on a weevily biscuit, and washed down with a small cup of resurrection tea, that was then in its fifth reincarnation.

"Yes, and we are likely to have a bit more of the same to-morrow," said Bentley, lighting his pipe, "and as I'm a little more hungry than I was before we sat down to pretend to eat, and it's your first turn to twiddle the lamp and doodle the mannikin, I'm going to try the truth of the saying 'He who sleeps dines.'"

The next morning, while Bentley was in the pit oiling the rifles one by one, Wells, who was on the look-out, suddenly said, "Gosh, sir, our old Geezer has sent his twin brother along, and the old gentleman evidently wants something. Just look at him, sir, pointing to his head and then hollering, and then shaking his head like mad. He's trying to explain he's dotty for sure."

"Not a bit of it," said Bentley, as he emerged from the pit. "I take it that he's deaf, and wants us to make him hear. That's a nice tall order."

Something had to be done, it was impossible to leave the poor old man grimacing and smiling indefinitely.

"I have heard," said Wells at length, "that sometimes an accumulation of wax in the ear may be removed by a syringeful of oil," and he produced out of the tool-chest a huge locomotive oil-squirt.

"Good idea; it can't do any harm, anyway," said Bentley, grinning amicably at the old chief, who was still continuing his gesticulations, and beckoning to him to approach.

The old fellow stepped rather gingerly up to the tent, eyeing the formidable instrument that Wells held in his hand askance.

Bentley patted him on the shoulder and told Wells to examine his ears.

This Wells did in a manner worthy of any Harley Street specialist.

"Oh! Rock of Ages!" he remarked, after inspecting one ear. "Now, let us see the other Cloaca Maxima," he muttered, somewhat unceremoniously turning the old gentleman's head the other way up. He took one look and then said to Bentley, "If those scientific gentlemen are right as to the time it takes to form alluvial deposits, I guess this old party is two or three million years old."

Without further ado, he inserted the end of the oil-squirt into one ear after the other, and squirted as much oil into each as would have sufficed to keep a locomotive running for a month.

The old chief was immensely pleased; as the oil streamed down both his cheeks, he smiled and nodded his head, and evidently thought it was fine. Wells finished the cleansing process with a piece of cotton waste on a bit of stick. He then gave a view halloo down the ear nearest to him, and to his delight the old man drew his head away sharply and began rubbing his ear. "Tickled him up," he said complacently to Bentley.

"Short of his being dead, I don't wonder," replied Bentley, who with difficulty had kept his countenance during the scene. "He seems immensely pleased, any way. Try him with the concertina."

Nothing loath, Wells placed the concertina within a foot of the old man's ear and favoured him with the most penetrating discords of his Scottish bagpipes. Bully, from the depths of the pit, where he was always chained up when Danakils were about, chimed in, and the old chief smiled again and nodded his head, leaning it still closer to the concertina so as to get the full benefit of the music.

"The cure is evidently only partial yet," said Bentley grimly, who was with difficulty refraining from stopping his own ears.

Wells, now thinking that he had done enough,

imitated the pantomime that Bentley had gone through the day before to indicate the setting and rising sun. Perhaps his acting was not so expressive; at any rate the old chief seemed to take it as part of the cure, and proceeded to imitate Wells' gestures as well as his enfeebled frame would allow.

Wells, with the most polite and friendly expression of voice, said, "Stop that, you perambulating collection of the refuse of ages, and take your smelly old carcase out of our camp, old monkey face." With this he gently led the old fellow back to his followers, who, seeing the happy grin that still extended between the two appendages that had been operated on, welcomed Wells with friendly glances.

Alas! Too-confident Wells! In a moment of aberration of mind he casually extracted an egg from the beard of the chief next to his patient. The result was instantaneous and unexpected. The offended Danakil flashed out a knife about two feet long and made a jab at Wells, which he just managed to avoid by a spring of some ten feet.

Bentley ran forward with his hands raised, smiling and nodding, and shouted to Wells: "Keep cool, and begin taking eggs out of my head, and keep on doing it till they are quiet."

Wells produced about a nestful from various parts of Bentley's anatomy, and the enraged Danakil, seeing that Bentley appeared none the worse, and feeling no evil consequences from the loss of the egg himself, eventually joined in the "Ow's!" of

applause. Wells completed the pacification by catching one of the much-prized Vacuum Oil mirrors from the air, and handing it to him by way of compensation for the egg.

A reputation for supernatural gifts, however, has its drawbacks, as they were to find in more ways than one, for when Bentley, later, tried to suggest a bargain for food, the savage mind was evidently logical enough to fail to comprehend how people who could produce anything that they might want out of the air, should need assistance in the small matter of a sufficiency to eat and drink. On this point they were absolutely obtuse, and what was worse, owing to the reputation gained by the first two successful cases, any savage who had any wound—and they all seemed to have sores of sorts—came to have it dressed. They did not dare to refuse, although the store of water was diminishing in consequence at an appalling rate.

They had now been alone in the desert over the anticipated ten days. Economize as they could in the way of food, almost their last tin had been opened, and they were dragging out an existence on the very thinnest gruel, as Wells called it. Bully had turned into a scavenger of refuse and used to wander with Bentley around the camp after the Danakils had gone—which they did invariably before sunset—and pick up anything that was at all eatable, without inquiring what it was.

In this manner they dragged out ten days more,

The last cup of water in the Bilen desert

Some of the troops who came down to our assistance on the Hawash river.

the only consolation being that gradually the rareeshow that they had provided for the savages appeared to pall from familiarity, and they were no longer so constantly surrounded. They were sincerely thankful for this, as it became more and more difficult to keep up appearances. They were growing starved and haggard looking, and if any more wounded men had come round they would have been forced to refuse to treat them, whatever the consequences might have been.

Every day they kept a feverish look out for George, and every night were forced to lie down disappointed.

Whether it was the want of food or the healthy desert air, in spite of the excessive heat, which, when they first started, had rendered it difficult to eat anything, now they were always ravenously hungry, as well as thirsty.

Day by day the weary wait dragged on till, after they had tapped the radiator for water, the day came when there was only one cupful left to divide between the three. No Danakils had put in an appearance for three days, and they had been even anxious for them to come, in the hope of once more trying to impress upon them the fact that they needed food and water.

On finding that the radiator refused to yield up more than this one cup, Bentley, in order to try to keep up their flagging spirits with a hope that he little felt, suggested that they should snap this last cup of water. It would be an interesting souvenir

for them to remember all their lives, if George put in an appearance, as he could not fail to do shortly, if not—well, he did not expatiate on that theme.

They got out the camera, and the photograph taken is reproduced.

They then each drank their share, poor Bully, whose turn came last, licking and licking the empty tin, long after the last drop had gone.

This was the twenty-sixth day of their stay in the desert, and so far to the credit of these two men it must be stated that the idea of abandoning the car and walking the twenty or thirty miles into safety had never struck them. Now this simple expedient was too late, for they neither of them had sufficient strength left for the journey without either water or food.

It was mid-day when they finished their water, and they spent the afternoon, as all previous afternoons, in vainly looking in turns through the glasses for any sign of George and the mules.

"Look here, Wells," said Bentley suddenly, and his speech was already becoming thick. "There is no sign of George, and if we wait till to-morrow we shall neither of us have strength to crawl. I'm going to have a try to fetch water. There must be a well somewhere over there, where the Danakils always used to come from. Maybe, they've gone, as we have not seen a sign of them for the last three days; or if they are there, I'll have to try a little 'jadoo' to get some. Get me that double-ended cup

that you used for conjuring, while I rummage for the flask into which I drained the last of the petrol."

These two articles being forthcoming, Bentley took a rifle, slung the Mauser pistol to his belt, and with two of the largest water-skins over his shoulder, shook hands with Wells, kissed Bully on his poor pinched nose, and started off as briskly as his shaky legs would take him.

In his hand he carried Wells' conjuring cup, the top end of which was filled with petrol and covered by an easily removable cap. He also had in his pocket the most powerful burning-glass.

CHAPTER X

A dash for water—The magic flame—Bentley and the fair sex—Wells in despair—Bully dying—Water—But no food—Poisoned—The last resource—One day more—George at last—A running fight—The Hawash river and safety.

THE country through which Bentley began his walk consisted of a series of low hills, dry and parched, with occasional huge boulders cropping up out of the ground. Clumps of bushy growth were sparsely dotted here and there, all so similar that he could fix on no special landmarks, so he was forced to "blaze" his road as well as he could as he went along.

Three miles is not a long distance, but it must be remembered that as yet he had no idea where the well that he was seeking was situated; that he was weak from starvation, and parched with thirst, and consequently could scarcely crawl up the rises, insignificant though they were.

He had the added knowledge that it was perfectly possible that he might miss the well and go on walking indefinitely past it; for although he kept as nearly as possible in the direction that the Danakils seemed to come from, he might easily, by now, be a mile or two out of the way.

Still he kept steadily on, stopping at every rise to look around for any sign that might indicate the presence of a well. In his desperation he almost prayed that the Danakils had not left the neighbourhood, because in that case they would probably see him, or he would see some of them and so find the well.

He had staggered on for about two hours, when, on topping a small rise with infinite labour, he suddenly found himself almost in the midst of over a hundred Danakils encamped round a well. They had women and children and camels with them, and had evidently been there for a long time.

His appearance on the rise was entirely unexpected, and many warriors jumped up and seized their spears, and it was perhaps fortunate for Bentley that the old chief, whose leg he had cured, was close to him, for otherwise they would probably have speared him first and then have speculated as to the cause of his visit afterwards.

As it was, the old chief held up his hand to stop any spear throwing and beckoned to Bentley to come forward. This he did as steadily as his tired limbs would allow, till he was close up to the side of the well.

The Danakil wells are dug with shelving banks that are propped up by tree trunks. They are, in fact, diminishing squares of timber, the top of each square forming a step until the final square filled with water is reached. Round the well were

ranged many square buckets and pots also filled with water.

Bentley pointed to these buckets and then to the skins he carried.

There was a general howl of dissent, and even the old chief shook his head and motioned to him that he had better be gone.

Bentley felt that he might just as well be killed then and there, as go back without the water that was now within reach; so, risking everything, he stooped down rapidly and pretended to fill the cup, that was already charged with petrol, from the nearest bucket. He then laughed and with a flourish produced the burning-glass, which he focused on to the petrol.

The astonished savages held their hands and watched him, and a cry of horror went up when the cup was seen to be flaming. This was intensified into a howl of despair when Bentley poured the contents of the cup into the bucket, which immediately also burst into flame.

The Danakils now prostrated themselves before him, evidently beseeching him not to burn their water.

Bentley was now master of the situation; he picked up the burning bucket and signed to two girls, who stood close by trembling, to approach. They looked at the old chief, who nodded impatiently; he was evidently prepared to agree to anything so long as Bentley took himself off from the vicinity of their precious water.

Bentley signed to the girls to pick up each a bucket, and then pointed in the direction from which he had come.

The girls tremblingly obeyed, and Bentley, with the still flaming bucket in his hand, walked backwards over the rise after them.

He glanced at the sun, and saw that in another half hour he would not have been able to light the petrol.

The two girls were already some fifty yards ahead, carrying the buckets on their heads, when he at length turned round to follow.

Bentley was impeded by the bucket he had himself commandeered, although the petrol had now burned itself out. He dared not call out to the girls, for fear of frightening them and causing them to spill the precious fluid for which he had risked so much. He made strenuous efforts to catch them up, and after moistening his mouth with a short drink, succeeded in getting close enough to them for a gentle "Hist!" to cause them to look round.

They stopped timidly and waited for him to come up to them.

He smiled at them to ease their fears, and unslinging the two water-skins he carried, he filled them from the buckets, and then tried to sling them over his shoulders and rise from the ground.

This he found was above his strength; the weight of the skins seemed to glue him to the ground. Hastily slipping the skins off his shoulder, he motioned

to one of the girls to imitate him, as though he had only been showing her what to do.

She came obediently and knelt down beside him, and he slipped the strap round her glistening black shoulders. She rose at once, a splendid young animal, not appearing to feel the weight that a moment before had seemed to crush the tired man beside her. Indeed, she was immensely proud of her new adornment, and stepped out with a dancing step, looking down proudly on the skins that beat against her thighs as she walked.

The other girl looked envious, although she still had a bucket three-quarters full on her head. Seeing this, Bentley, who was ever considerate of the feelings of the other sex, gave her his rifle to carry, which weighed close upon ten pounds, and which he had seriously considered the advisability of throwing away.

She preened her head and threw the barrel over her shoulder in quite military fashion, and the march was resumed.

Bentley, feeling that now friendly relations were established, patted both his companions on the shoulder and chucked them under the chin, and as they walked, allowed them to look at their faces in one of the mirrors he had in his pocket.

He then—for he was getting so weak that he could hardly drag one foot after the other—passed one of his arms through that of each girl and walked on.

"Old Wells would say that this is a little bit of all right," he chuckled to himself, as he leaned more and more of his weight on to his two companions, who seemed to like it, and laughed and squeezed his arms with theirs, and had evidently got over any fear of him.

It soon began to grow dark, and Bentley kept a look-out for the first beam of the searchlight, and kept tight hold of the girls, for fear of a stampede when they saw the "evil eye" at close quarters.

But no searchlight appeared, and then he remembered that, of course, Wells, having no water, could not light the light. He felt nonplussed at first as to how he should find the car, and then he realized that, so far from his having been guiding the girls, they had in reality been guiding him; and that although he had not the faintest idea how to find his way back to the car without the guidance of a light, they would probably take him there without any hesitation.

They walked on and on, and although they made far better time than Bentley had done in the afternoon, the journey seemed to him endless.

At length they saw the dim shadow of the car and tent quite close to them. Wells had not even troubled, it seemed, to light the paraffin side-lamps; for except for a thin streak of light that passed through the fly of the tent, the camp was in darkness and might have been abandoned. There was no sign of Wells and no sign of Bully.

Bentley motioned to the girls to wait where they were, and lifted up the fly of the tent.

He saw Wells, with his face buried in one hand, sitting on a packing-case beside a little bed that he had made for the apparently lifeless form of Bully, one of whose paws he held in his other hand.

Neither man nor dog made any movement as Bentley approached, and it was not until he placed his hand gently on Wells' shoulder that the latter raised his face, drawn with agony, and just one faint little flop of the tail showed that Bully was still alive.

"Wells, man! It's all right. It's really me. And I've got water. See!" and he rushed out, took the bucket from the girl, and brought it into the tent.

He took a cup, and filling it, he held it to Wells' lips, for his hand was shaking too much for him to hold it himself. Wells took one sip and then pointed to Bully. Bentley leaned over the dog, and dripped a few drops on to his parched and swollen tongue. The effect was immediate; the touch of the water seemed to act like an electric shock, and Bully at once raised his head and looked eagerly for more.

"Drink, Wells; I'll attend to poor old Bully."

Wells, seeing Bully revive, sipped the revivifying fluid slowly and gluttonously, watching Bully the while.

Bully was presently able to raise himself, and his

tail wriggle gradually grew less pathetic and more joyful.

Bentley then remembered the girls outside, whom he found squatting on their haunches quite contentedly in native fashion. He gave them each a looking-glass, and then pointed to the way whence they had come, but they both firmly and decisively refused to budge.

Wells appeared at the opening of the tent, with the precious cup still in his hand. His eyes were regaining their customary twinkle, and he gave a low chuckle as he became witness of the refusal.

"It is a bit late for them to wander about the crowded streets without a chaperon," he muttered, as he went to replenish the searchlight.

As soon as he had sufficient pressure he lighted the lamp, and then at once turned the beam towards the well.

"I thought so," he murmured, as he noticed a throng of Danakils, who had crept quite close in the absence of the accustomed flare. "Good-bye, old dears; not to-night, thank you."

"Now, my dusky beauties," he continued, turning to the girls and handing them each a string of beads, "off you go after your friends," and he pointed to the vanishing crowd.

The girls, who were evidently very much alarmed at the close proximity of the intense light, snatched at the beads and took themselves off as fast as their legs could carry them.

"By Jove!" said Wells. "I feel a man again. We've got enough water to last us another week. How did you manage, sir?"

Bentley gave a short account of his trip, ending with the remark that he seemed just to have got back in time, as the Danakils appeared to have followed to make out what he wanted their water for.

"Let us hope they tumbled to the truth—that we wanted some of it to make fire out of," said Wells, pointing to the lamp.

Now that their killing thirst was assuaged, the pangs of hunger were worse than ever, and Bentley suggested a final hunt for anything eatable in the car.

They had already tried gear-case grease, but it was not very sustaining, and the after-effects had proved disastrous. Their cooking-pot was absolutely empty, scraped as clean as possible with their knives, and afterwards positively polished by Bully. They turned over and shook every package in the car, but there was absolutely nothing left. At last, with a yell of delight, Wells unearthed from some forgotten corner a battered old tin, that evidently at one time had had a label on it. It purported to come from the Army and Navy Stores; so much they could decipher, and they thought they could still make out the letters "ing."

"It seems soup of sorts," said Bentley, as he manipulated the tin-opener.

"And a bit high at that," said Wells, holding his nose.

"Can't help that," said Bentley; "the air must have got to it. Into the pot with it, with some boracic acid. It's been dripping one time."

With the best intentions, three mouthfuls each of the unsavoury mess was all that they could manage; even Bully turned up his nose at it, and preferred one of his mysterious rambles. It proved a good thing, too, that they did not eat more, for in the night they were both seized with fearful pains and vomiting, which Bentley diagnosed as ptomaine poisoning. In the morning they could scarcely crawl, and they took opium for the relief it offered to the pain, careless of the consequences.

The weary day, the most miserable day that they had spent and the most hopeless, dragged on. Fortunately the Danakils, evidently more nervous still of their magic powers, kept at a discreet distance, although some of them could occasionally be seen on the watch.

At sundown they felt a little easier, and thanks to the sustaining power of the opium, even a little stronger. There was still no sign of George, and after a final look just as the sun was setting, Bentley called Bully to him, and patting his head, said to Wells: "Wells, we may be able to stick it out till to-morrow night, but if by that time there is no sign of George, we shall have to kill this poor old doggy, you know?"

"Not if I can get a hyena to-night," said Wells, using his final strength in demolishing his cherished

mannikin with a vicious pull. "Perhaps they'll come round again to-night, now that is gone, and if we only use the searchlight from time to time to show the Danakils that it is going."

They sat glum and silent well into the night with their rifles ready, and twice got a shot, but were too weak to drag themselves to the kill in time to save the carcase from the ravenous teeth of the rest of the hungry brutes, before whom they were forced to give way, for they had left their rifles by the car.

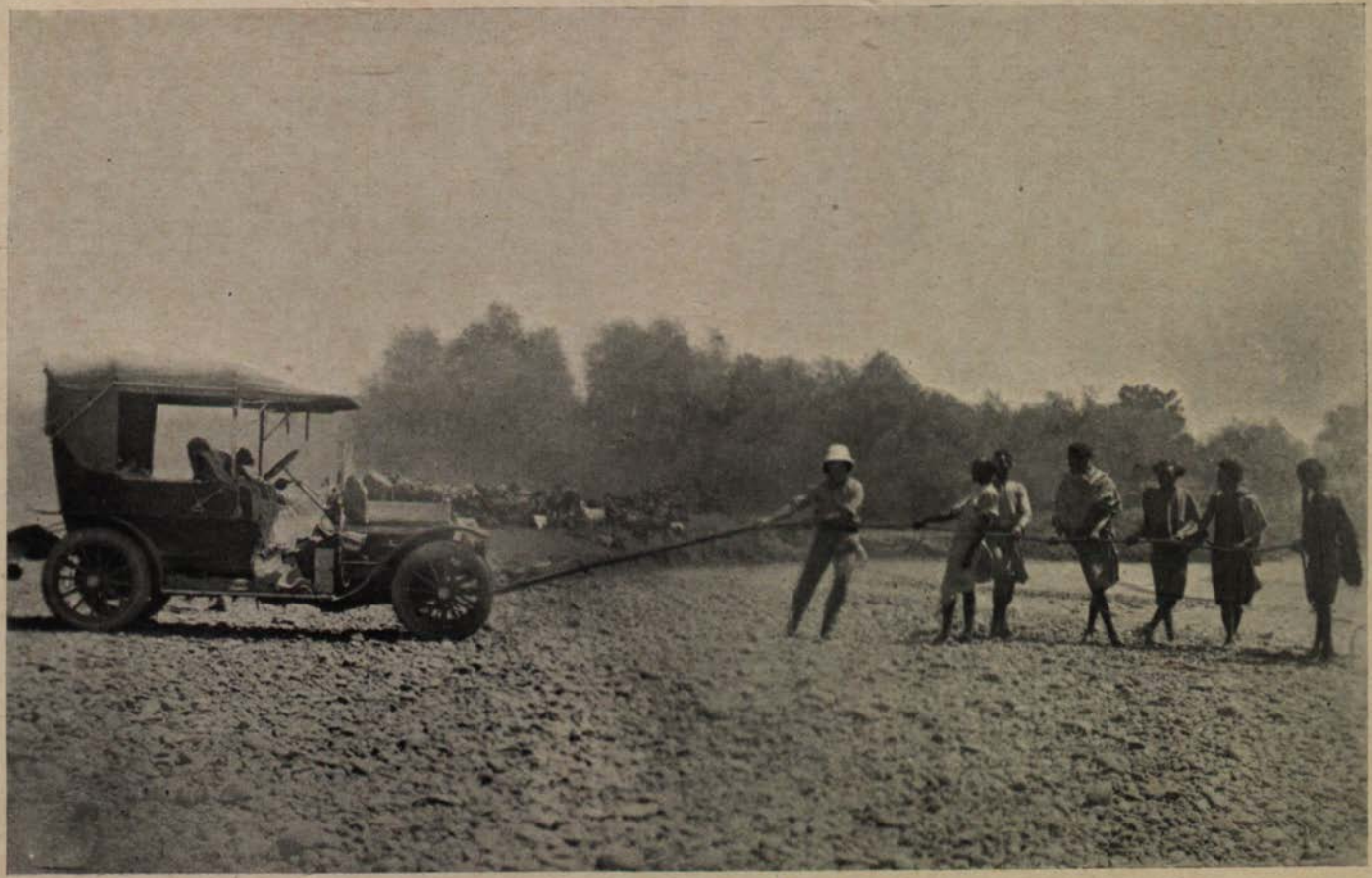
"It's no use, Wells," gasped Bentley, as they sank down by the car, exhausted after the second attempt. "We are used up. Here, I'll spin this coin, and the one who loses does it to-morrow night. It's no use, old man. Bully, poor old darling, will be better off than he is now," he finished with a gulp in his throat.

Wells cried heads—it fell tail.

Neither man spoke the rest of that night.

The next morning they were all perceptibly weaker, and Bully, who seemed to know why each caressed him furtively when the other was not looking, snuggled up to them and licked their hands, and lapped water occasionally, for they gave him plenty, so that his last day might be as happy as they could make it.

As the sun began to get low, Wells, who had not said three words all day, said suddenly: "I've been thinking, sir, if we could chloroform him without his knowing it, I could shoot him while he was unconscious."



How we got out of soft sand Bully at wheel

Where we crossed the Hawash river on return journey. (See page 310.)

Bentley nodded his head without speaking and threw Wells the key of the medicine-chest.

Wells dragged himself to the car and presently returned with the bottle of chloroform and a pad.

Bentley stooped down and kissed Bully's nose, and then walked, biting his lip, to the car, into which he dragged himself, seized the glasses and waited for the sound of the shot.

No shot came, however, and presently Wells dragged himself to the car and said huskily: "I can't do it, sir. I'd got the pad ready, when he looked at me and licked my hand—and—I'd rather kill a baby."

Bentley seized the pad roughly from his hand and began to walk towards Bully, who rolled on his back and wagged his tail. Bentley coughed, threw away the pad, and said huskily to Wells, "We'll give George one more day. I can stick it out, if you can."

Wells nodded, and Bully crawled up to the car, and the three of them sat together on the steps and waited.

They had no dinner to prepare, nothing to do but wait—wait still, as they had now been waiting twenty-seven days. They sat, heavy-eyed and in pain, occasionally sipping water, for of this now they were not sparing, for it was useless to be so; they sat silent and grim, and waited.

"My God! What's that, sir?" said Wells,

suddenly raising his head, after they had been sitting in silence for an hour, and the sun was just setting. "That's a shot—and there's another."

Bentley seized the glasses and could see two mules and four men hurrying towards them, while some distance behind he could make out more men and camels. The evident hurry of the mules, coupled with the sound of the shots, made it evident that the men with the camels were pursuing, not following.

"It's George," said Bentley, "and he seems to have picked up some Danakils by the way."

"And here come our old friends over the hill," said Wells.

Fortunately the pursuing Danakils were some way behind George and the mules, and on sight of the car, which was evidently new to them, they stopped, while the Danakils on the hill remained watching for the present.

George and his three men arrived breathless, and Bentley immediately shot both mules, as they could not waste time in trying to steady them at sight of the car, which, although they were nearly used up, they refused to approach, and, besides, he was in no humour to leave them as a present to the savages.

George had some tins of essence of beef and some biscuits in a bag, and while Bentley was shooting the mules he handed a tin to Wells with some biscuits. Wells dipped a biscuit in the tin and then broke it in half and gave half to Bully, then ate

the other half himself; and they went on at this, while Bentley was doing the same, until George had poured two tins into the tank.

Then Bentley staggered to the handle, but he had not strength to lift it over the compression, Wells reeled to him and tried in his turn, but fell all of a heap as he bent to grasp the handle.

"All right, boss," said George, and he lifted his attenuated form and put him in the car, and lifted Bully in beside him, and gave them more essence of beef and biscuits. Meanwhile Bentley remembered to fill the radiator.

Then George gave the handle a twist and to their delight the engine immediately started racing. Wells leaned over and closed the throttle.

"Gad! that sounds good," he said, taking another biscuit, which he shared with Bully.

They threw the remaining petrol tins into the car, but they had not time to collect all the goods that George had brought, for the Danakils who had been pursuing George had some old-fashioned guns, and now they began to make play with these at a range of about two hundred yards.

Their shooting was not first-class, but still a car is a fairly large target, and, bad as the shooting was, the missiles were probably heavy, and might do a deal of damage if a hit did come off.

Bentley therefore scrambled into the driver's seat and told all the men to climb on the car as best they could, and then he let in his clutch and started,

just as the Danakils on the hill finally seemed to make up their minds to a forward move.

Whether it was that the guns required a few minutes to reload or that the sight of the moving car was so interesting that the Danakils forgot to fire, nothing happened except a great deal of movement and excitement as Bentley steered straight for the crowd of men and camels that were blocking their advance.

George and his three Abyssinians were armed, but Bentley ordered them not to fire, as it was no use exasperating the savages, and he was in hopes that in a very few more yards the camels, at any rate, would stampede.

This in fact happened, for when the car was within fifty yards, the camels bolted *en masse*, and in the confusion caused by this, Bentley made a sudden change in direction so as to skirt round the crowd.

He was beginning to think that he would get away all right, when there was a bang and a thud, and one of the Abyssinians fell forward with half his head blown off.

It was necessary to put them off such aim as they had, so Bentley shouted to Wells and George to let them have it. The four rifles cracked almost simultaneously, and they reloaded and fired as fast as the bumping car would let them. The Danakils stood their ground for a while, but when the penetrating quality of the fire at such short range became apparent, scattered over the plain, and Bentley,

who was now bumping along at over fifteen miles an hour, told George to cease firing.

The sun had set by now, and it would soon be quite dark, but stopping to light the lamps was out of the question, as the Danakils were making what haste they could after them, and judging from the firing that they kept up, were evidently infuriated at the losses they had sustained.

The going was fairly good, and they were soon left behind, and Bentley and Wells were just congratulating themselves on having seen the last of them, when the front wheels of the car suddenly ploughed into a mass of loose sand, and the impetus of the car drove them well in up to the axle.

Reversing was not the least good, and they had to set the Abyssinians and George to dig the wheels out. They themselves had not strength to lift a shovel, much less dig.

It took over a quarter of an hour before they were out on firm ground again, and by this time Wells had the lamps burning. They were only just in time, especially as they had to go very cautiously on the look-out for firm ground, for the Danakils were close upon them again before they dare put on any speed.

They still had the dead Abyssinian in the car, and as soon as he felt that he dare do so, Bentley pulled up, and they buried the brave fellow who had given his life to save them.

They then resumed their journey, and soon found

themselves on the fringe of the dense vegetation that marked the vicinity of the river.

It was useless to attempt to take the car through this at night, so they camped among the trees in a clearing, and kept a good look out for any pursuing Danakils, though George did not think it was likely that they would follow, for news travels fast among savages, and they were probably as well aware as he was that a force of Abyssinian soldiers was on its way to meet the car.

George proved right, for although the shaking in the car had not improved their pains and therefore they got little rest, they were not molested during the night, and the next morning George and the Abyssinians worked like Trojans in clearing a path for the car, so that they reached the bank of the river a little after mid-day, having been in the desert exactly one lunar month.

They fell out of the car into the grateful shade of the trees, and both now lay helpless, while George busied himself about preparing camp.

The scenery was now of a very different order to that by which they had been surrounded for the past weary month. All along the bank of the river tropical vegetation was luxuriant, and they could see green grass-covered plains extending right to the foot of Mount Fantallé on their left as they faced the river. On the other side of the river the country already began to become mountainous, and they could see that it would now be a steady rise all the

way, until they reached the plains around the capital. The country ahead, although plentifully timbered, could be seen to be rocky and very rough and by no means ideal for motoring.

In their present weak state they were content to lie and look ahead, and wait for the time when they hoped they might be strong enough to move again.

They were now not far from populated lands, and George went off on an expedition, from which he returned with some milk and eggs, and this simple diet, after what they had been existing on for the past three weeks, did more to help them on towards recovery than all the drugs in the medicine-chest, though they sampled a good few of those.

Bully, in spite of the shock to his nerves from the fate he had so narrowly escaped, bore no ill-feeling, and made the most rapid recovery of the three, and was soon able to waddle about again among the trees, the shade of which he much appreciated.

After four days of complete rest and as much food as they dare eat, they felt well enough to be on the move again, especially as yet there was no sign of the promised army of succour.

CHAPTER XI

Recuperating—Bridge building—Bully and Wells both discomfited by monkeys—Another disaster—Wells succumbs to his feelings—The relief force—Repairs—Washing day—Ready to start once more.

THE Hawash river may be taken as the dividing line between the plains surrounding the coast and the mountainous district that leads right up to the high table-lands, in the midst of which lies Adis Ababa, the new capital of Abyssinia. It is perhaps the most important watercourse in the country, and even in the dry season is always some sixty feet broad. It runs between high, shelving banks, that sometimes slope down to the bed of the river at a steep gradient, at other times descend almost perpendicularly. Generally, where there is a slope, the water in the dry season is fordable; between the perpendicular banks it runs deep. There are bridges built by Europeans over the river along the direct routes, but the habit of the country is to close these bridges to traffic during the dry season by driving posts across the entry on either side, so that passengers are perforce obliged to make use of the fords. As, in the words of a distinguished traveller: "Many caravans experience everything short of tragedy in

fording the Hawash," the reason of this closing of the bridges is not apparent; but Bentley, having satisfied himself by inquiry from the natives, whom he met in his excursions for a fordable place, that the *did-dil* (bridge) some ten miles away was indeed thus closed, felt that it would be useless to cut his way along all that distance only to find his further progress barred at the end. Besides, he must wait for his dilatory escort somewhere near the spot indicated by George as the place where he would strike the river after leaving the desert.

It was useless thinking of trying to ford the river in the car, for the water at the shallowest spot he could find would have swamped the engine. Even the idea of a floating raft similar to the one that had served for the Monkey river had to be abandoned, for the slope with the easiest gradient would have been utterly impracticable for a car on account of the loose nature of the sandy and stony ground.

If they had swung the car down by ropes, it would have meant days and days of preparation to secure a flat resting-place for it, and then it appeared almost impossible to get it up the other side.

It was undoubtedly the worst puzzler that they had encountered yet, and, as soon as they were strong enough, they wandered disconsolately along the banks, looking for any place that seemed at all possible. At length they decided that as the shelving banks were no use to them, the only thing to do was to choose the place where the perpendicular banks

approached each other most closely, and to throw a bridge over from bank to bank. This meant crossing the river about thirty feet above the water, while the span of the bridge at the most likely-looking spot would be nearly fifty feet, and this only because at that spot the banks actually overhung the river. They looked solid enough, however, and Bentley determined to have a try at bridge-building, as there was plenty of timber handy, and also there were trees on both sides, that would serve for buttresses to which he could lash his stays. He therefore sent George off in search of labour, either hired or commandeered, in virtue of Atto Negato's stamped papers, though, as he was now out of that worthy's jurisdiction, he had but little faith in them, but relied more on the well-known avariciousness of the Abyssinian for the white man's gold, which occasionally causes him to forget himself sufficiently to take on a job of work.

The two Abyssinians who had come with George, when shown the shining axes, made no difficulty about a warfare on the trees, and after much laughter and bungling at first soon began to make the chips fly.

Bentley went back to the tent and sat with a large pocket-book on his knees, sketching the rough plan of his bridge; Wells, who had made friends with a casual visitor to the camp, who had wandered from some neighbouring village, walked off with him, for he professed to be able to show him the whereabouts of some fine kudu, whose tracks he had picked up as he came along.

Bully first of all lay asleep at Bentley's feet, and then, finding bridge-planning dry work, wandered about the clear space in front of the tent, snuffling among the longish grass and low bushes.

Bentley, looking up from his work, saw that he had found something of interest, but as he showed no signs of being annoyed, only pleased, did not trouble to investigate.

What Bully had happened on was a baby monkey also out for a stroll.

Bully in all his life had never hurt anything small and helpless, but he thought a baby monkey would be an excellent thing to have a romp with. So he sniffed the little thing over, and then, as it sat gibbering with fright, he lay down before it, wagging his tail, and after one or two spasmodic jumps of invitation, put one great paw on it and rolled it playfully over. The little monkey, which up to this time had been too paralysed with fear to utter a sound, let out an agonized squeak as it rolled over.

The result of that squeak was that a sort of avalanche of fur dropped from somewhere in the clouds just in front of Bully's nose. He received two sound cuffs, one on each ear, and the baby monkey was spirited away into a tree, before Bully, with his tail between his legs, had time to turn round and make a bee-line for Bentley, who had now put down his book to laugh at him.

"That was mamma monkey, Bully, my boy," he said, and Bully retired into the tent to think it out.

Bentley became engrossed in his work again, when, about an hour afterwards, Bully rushed out of the tent in great excitement. Bentley looked up and saw Wells, who had been gone about two hours, still accompanied by his Abyssinian shikari, racing back to camp with what seemed a crowd of natives in hot pursuit.

Bentley soon saw that the pursuers were dog-headed baboons, and picking up a rifle prepared to take a hand in the game.

But the baboons, at the sight of the camp and car, stopped and retired, and Wells rushed up panting.

When he had got his breath, he told Bentley that he had followed the spoor of the kudu, and had brought down a bull with a good head, when, on walking up to the kill, he noticed what he thought were some natives dodging him behind the trees. He thought that possibly they might be Danakils, who had ventured after all thus far; but from what he had seen of them they would not have wasted time dodging about. Anyway, he wanted his kudu, and so he began to walk forward. The rest had better be told in Wells' own words: "I'd only taken two paces forward, when one of them ups and throws a stone at me. Well, you see, sir, I know enough of this blamed country now to know that it doesn't do for a white man to let a nigger take cockshies at him with rocks without retaliating, so I let rip at what I could see of the beggar, and I must have hit him. My Lord! When he jumped from behind the tree I saw he was a monstrous great monkey,

and he'd got a regiment of friends, who all began slinging stones at once. I made no bones about it, but started for camp with the lot after me. One fellow caught me a whack on a part of my person which might have been my head, but wasn't, and it made me run all the quicker."

Wells was much upset at the loss of his kudu, so Bentley called the boys and armed them, and they all started off together, if necessary to dispute the prize with the baboons, but they found the kudu and no opposition. It was a fine bull of the greater species, with excellent horns, and made a good addition to their trophies.

George came back in the evening with four men, who had brought their wives with them. It is the habit of the Abyssinian to let women do such work as happens to be hanging about, and, in fact, although the men condescended to wave an axe about in a desultory kind of way for two or three hours a day, the women proved much the more useful. Bentley and Wells, fairly strong again now, between them did most of the tree-felling; but the women did the carting and shifting of the timber, and soon learned how to bind the stays together.

Bentley chose the six longest and stoutest trees he could find, and firmly spliced three together end to end, and did the same with the other three. He thus had two stout poles about seventy feet long. He then rigged his tackle on to a strong tree near the bank, as high up as he dared, and fastened a heavy

rope to the end of his pole. He then attached lighter ropes to the sides as guide-ropes, and still another rope which he had carried across the river over the nearest fordable spot.

The rope on the shackle prevented the pole dipping, and Wells and two boys went over and fixed a shackle on a tree on the opposite bank, and by this means they finally got one of the poles across. In spite of the sustaining ropes, it sagged greatly in the middle, and they drove struts into the bank, jutting out as far as they could reach, so that the bridge, when completed, would be half trestle and half suspension. Fortunately they had plenty of rope in the car, and for binding purposes a species of tough creeper that was plentiful served excellently.

The work progressed but slowly, for although the space to be traversed was barely as much as between the wickets of a cricket-pitch, it was no small matter, once they had the space spanned, to strengthen the structure up to the point of carrying the chassis.

Not satisfied with his two original poles, Bentley fashioned two more, and strutted these as before. The skeleton bridge was now sufficiently firm to walk on, and they tied ropes to the centre and by means of the shackles pulled these ropes taut to trees on the bank about twenty feet from the ground. This lifted the centre of the bridge, and necessitated a deal of new strutting. Finally they had to cut a sufficiency of six-feet logs to make a road over the four poles. Taking two logs to the foot, this meant

over a hundred logs, each one of which had to be firmly lashed in four places. They began this from both sides of the river, and it seemed as though they would never meet in the middle. And all this time no signs of the relieving force. If they had trusted to that to get them out of the desert, their bones would have been bleaching long before this.

The Abyssinian men were interested, but not eager ; they unbent sufficiently to assist in binding the logs, at which work they were clever, while the women did the hard work of dragging the logs to the bank, and then carrying them on to the bridge and putting them in place.

The news that engineering operations were going on soon spread and they had many visitors, who occasionally either strolled over or rode on camels to view the rising structure. Some of these visitors had the foresight to bring milk and eggs and honey, of which there seems an endless supply throughout the whole of Abyssinia, and which forms the principal ingredient of the staple drink tej, which, in spite of its sweetness, is quite sufficiently intoxicating to render one half of the population in a state of permanent and good-humoured inebriation.

The principal occupation of their visitors, and, indeed, of the whole population, seemed laughter and tej-drinking. Wells said that they ought by now to be merry souls, for the hyenas laughed all night and the natives all day, so there should not be much time left for blues.

Eventually the road in the middle of the bridge met, with the usual difficulty of getting the last logs into place, and they marched in solemn body across, tentatively at first, and then in such step as they could train their entourage, and finally the whole dozen of them, men, women and dog, jumped together, gradually nearer and nearer the middle, and still the bridge seemed firm as a rock, and except for a little creaking was a triumph of engineering skill; and Bully, for one, was never tired of crossing and re-crossing, although his progress was not dignified, for he regularly slipped between the logs, and with equal regularity fell on his nose.

The day that the bridge was pronounced complete they rested, and Wells favoured the visitors with a little music and a display of legerdemain. He, now that he was in friendly country, dared to produce his famous "Robert Houdin" trick, which he had been longing to try on the Danakils, but felt that it perhaps might not be wise to instil into them too great an idea of his invulnerability, for fear that they might be induced to experiment.

This trick had formed the one staple theme of conversation of the broken-down old Frenchman from whom he had taken lessons in conjuring.

When the French were first conquering Algiers, they had a deal of trouble with the dervishes and their magic, and so to combat this they enlisted the services of the great Robert Houdin. the most famous prestidigitateur of the period.

One of the dervish's most awe-inspiring pieces of magic was the sufficiently well-known pistol trick, in which, having loaded one of their old-fashioned pistols in full sight of the audience, they allowed themselves to be fired at and caught the bullet either between their teeth or on the blade of a knife. Houdin soon exposed that trick by explaining that he was perfectly well aware of the construction of the pistol used, which allowed the bullet to drop into the stock. He then told the dervish that in order to prove the real invulnerability of the white man's wizard, he would allow him to shoot at him with his own war-pistol loaded by himself, and for the purpose he supplied him with a charge of powder and a leaden ball. The dervish, nothing loath, loaded his pistol with alacrity, not forgetting, in response to Houdin's gibes, to hammer the ball well home. There was no mistake that he was properly loaded, and he turned with a malignant grin towards the Frenchman, waiting to see what paraphernalia he would use to escape the shot. Houdin merely stood with his arms folded and told him to shoot. The dervish even now took the trouble to warn him that he was in no mood to play accomplice to the trick by missing him, and that if he fired, he would fire to kill. Houdin bowed and said that that was what he expected. The dervish took careful aim and fired, and Houdin caught the ball in his teeth. This was too much for the dervish, and he disappeared suddenly.

Now this simple but effective trick Wells was able to perform with real powder and leaden ball, provided that the pistol used was a muzzle-loader, for the simple reason that Robert Houdin had taken the precaution of having his leaden bullet made of powdered lead glued together and nicely polished. The act of ramming it down a tight barrel reduced the lead once more to powder, and rendered the charge harmless.

Wells had difficulty in persuading any one of the friendly Abyssinians to undertake his murder, so Bentley had to oblige in the character of executioner. In this way the trick lost some of its dramatic intensity, and Wells was left regretting that he had not a few Danakils present, who, no doubt, would have obliged *con gusto.*

Although the day was most successful, Wells, as an artist, was on the whole disappointed, for the most successful event of the afternoon proved to be the time-honoured three-card trick, the fascination of which never seemed to pall, especially with the variation of the presumably wanted card with its corner slightly turned up. There is no doubt that with a little encouragement his audience would have bet all their personal belongings, wives and camels included, but Bentley felt that this might prove a bad introduction to Court circles, and so they restrained themselves.

The next morning they took the body off the car, and first of all carried all the stores over the bridge, then they harnessed the whole crowd to

the body and dragged that over. The bridge gave one or two rather ominous creaks, but no more than during the jumping of the day before.

Then came the final test under the weight of the chassis. Bentley got into the improvised seat and drove on to the bridge. It seemed perfectly solid, and after he had gone a few yards he backed off again and sent Wells over with the camera to take a picture of the car crossing the bridge.

Alas for vanity! That picture was never taken. Although the bridge itself was undoubtedly strong enough, the banks were not. Bentley got safely nearly half-way and then the whole fabric began to subside. There was no sudden fall, merely a gradual collapse as the bridge seemed to slip bodily down, down to the water—merely sagging more and more in the middle as the ropes cracked that stayed it to the bending trees. Once the alluvial soil of the banks was on the move, it went on crumbling away, and finally the car in the midst of the distorted bridge reached the water with a loud splash, Bentley and Bully, who were on the car, taking the precaution of taking headers into the water on opposite sides.

Wells waited horrified until he saw Bentley and Bully safely swim and wade to the shore, and then his overstrained feelings were too much for him to stand this final catastrophe. He put his helmet over his eyes and sobbed like a child.

"After bringing it so far, and nearly getting killed over the blooming thing a dozen times, there

it is at last at the bottom of this blessed river," he spluttered.

"Rot, Wells. We came down so quietly that I don't believe the chassis is even strained. The water is not six feet deep, and if we had any decent help we'd yank it out in no time and haul it up what is left of the bank."

It certainly was a bit of a mess to get out of, for the timber of the bridge tried to float, and they soon found that their efforts to get the car out would be useless without very considerable assistance. They spent most of the afternoon in the water, and the only satisfaction they could find was that the car was still upright, and as far as they could make out, uninjured; but although they rigged the shackles and tried their best to get a move on it, it would not budge.

The position was not a very dignified one, and they were grateful for the good taste of their native companions, who refrained from jeering, as no doubt an English crowd would not have failed to do.

In spite of the precept to go through Abyssinia laughing, they could not find one spark of humour wherewith to enliven the situation.

Bentley paced the bank backwards and forwards utterly nonplussed. Alone and unaided, they were likely to remain by the river indefinitely. At length he called George, and told him to go off with one of the boys and try to pick up the relief expedition, which, even allowing for native delays, ought to be somewhere on the road by now.

George was on the point of starting, although

it was close on evening, when they saw a body of men with mules and camels descending a hill about a mile off. This was no doubt the advance guard of the relief, and George started at once to meet them.

In another hour the camp was surrounded by four or five hundred Abyssinian soldiers, with quite a number of mules and camels, and Bentley made clear to the officers the predicament they were in.

These latter were sympathetic, and put their forces at his disposal in every way, so it was determined to start work on extricating the chassis the next morning at sunrise.

Bentley had now unlimited power at his command; the problem was to use it so that the chassis might be extracted from its uncomfortable position with as little damage as possible.

The logs of the bridge were simply in the way, although they held together still in many places; it was impossible for the chassis to bump through them, so the first thing was to clear them away and let them float down the quiet stream.

He then fixed ropes to the chassis and started a hundred men gradually pulling. By degrees it began to flounder through the water, and at length came into sight in shallower water. It would be a question of practically lifting it up the steep bank, and in order to avoid straining the steering-gear he went into the water with Wells and they lashed a strong plank across the two front wheels. They then resumed hauling, and with gangs of men on either

side keeping the car from toppling over, they finally half-hauled, half-lifted the chassis on to firm ground, and the Hawash river was crossed.

Fortunately the Abyssinian is never in a hurry, and the officers showed no signs of impatience when they were told that it was impossible to gauge the number of days that they might have to wait until the car had been put into running order again.

Bentley and Wells were so pleased to have the chassis in front of them again that they did not shirk at the idea of taking the whole fabric to pieces and building it up again if it were necessary to do so. In reality they found that practically no damage was done. The spring stay that they had fashioned at the Monkey river had given out and required replacing, but beyond throwing away all petrol and oil and grease and thoroughly cleaning the whole car, they had little in the way of repairing to do.

Fortunately they had ample supplies now, and though the sun was still hot the atmosphere was not nearly so stifling as it had been hitherto.

After three days' toil they were able to start the engine again, and then they replaced the body and were once more ready for a move. The only observable damage was one crumpled wing, which defied all their efforts to straighten it thoroughly.

They were ready to move, but apparently their gallant escort was not, for it needed two full days more before they were ready to make a start.

One of those off days, therefore, Wells employed in

freshening himself up. Both the Englishmen had emerged from the desert looking like old, shrivelled men, with wrinkles a quarter of an inch deep all over their faces. They had picked up wonderfully, and were both quite cheerful again; and Wells owned that he believed, after what they had so far gone through, it would take some stopping to prevent them reaching the capital.

Wells had a predilection for being clean, and certainly for the last six weeks he had not been able to indulge this, but now there was plenty of water and plenty of time. Bentley, therefore, found him seated by a pool where the water eddied slowly, clad solely in his pith helmet, while around him were a variety of nondescript articles in various shades of mud colour.

Bentley gave one of these shapeless masses a surreptitious kick and shouted out that he had hurt his toe.

"Hurt your toe, indeed, sir," said Wells indignantly. "I'll trouble you not to kick my best flannel shirt. Hulloo!" he continued, picking up the spurned vestment. "Now I wonder why that is! It is a bit stiff! It took me a devil of a time to wash the beastly thing. And look at this—and this," he said, picking up two twisted lumps and dropping them one after the other with a thud. "My best Bond Street socks, as was."

For about half an hour they kneaded industriously at the clothes, twisting and rolling them up and

unrolling them in a vain attempt to make them pliable. At length Wells, after many struggles, donned the shirt, and stared indignantly at Bentley, who was now rolling about with laughter, for what had once been a full-sized shirt for a man had now become a very small boy's size, clad in which, and a solar topee, Wells presented a picture the artistic effect of which was not diminished by his assumed air of indignation.

"At any rate, I'm clean, sir," Wells remarked witheringly.

"You are," said Bentley complacently; "and I shouldn't wonder if you are able to move your neck in a week or two, and you'll no doubt about work your feet into those socks by the time we reach the capital."

Wells opened his mouth for a crushing retort, but stooped down just in time to catch Bully by the tail as he was walking off with the seat of his pants in his mouth, while the legs trailed gracefully on either side.

Bully dropped the pants and promptly seized a sock, and tore round and round in a circle, with Wells, still clad only in shirt and topee, after him.

Eventually Wells sat down and threw a clod of earth at him, which caught him fairly on the tail, and he dropped the sock and rushed at Wells, who was not too well balanced, and rolled him over.

The fight that ensued was Homeric, and when it was over Bentley remarked that he thought they might both now be considered convalescent.

CHAPTER XII

En route for Choba—Difficult travelling—Escort more ornamental than useful—Mr. Wyatt—Choba—Mr. Hohler on the telephone—"Durgo"—A blacksmith's shop—Off again—Mules—Motoring by dynamite—A typical day.

AT length they made a start, Wells driving, spick and span, with an added haughtiness due to the stiffness of his collar. Bully sat beside him, also spick and span, although his bones still rattled when he moved. Bentley tried to pretend that he was lolling back in the car—in reality he was trying to find chinks without sharp edges into which he could fit his legs; for, although they had distributed most of their cargo amongst the mules, there were still packages enough in the car and to spare.

Around them tramped their escort, jovial and communicative, if slightly odoriferous. Wells was much disappointed to hear that again this was only to be a comparatively short spell of ease and magnificence, and that Bentley proposed to drop the escort at Choba, now some fifty miles off.

As yet they only saw the hills, for such few that they surmounted were only excrescences from the

plains, in comparison to the vast ranges of mountains that they saw before them.

They were now in the midst of the richest game country between the sea and the mountains, and on all sides, in spite of the noise of the moving troops, they could see herds on herds of antelopes, such as the high veldt in the south must have shown prior to the advent of the Dutch, to whom game laws were unknown. Zebra, kudu, oryx, and once even elephants, they saw in the distance, and Bentley promised himself a week or two on the return journey in this hunter's paradise.

With hundreds of willing hands to help over difficult places—and very nearly every foot was difficult—they made progress; although each night they were glad enough to camp, wondering vaguely as to what was going to happen when they came to the difficult part of the way, which the officers always smilingly assured them was not far off.

Nor was it. Very soon the road became a sort of endless staircase with most of the steps missing; and up this the car had to be lumped somehow, with the bland assurance that they might expect it to get worse and worse daily until the plains above were reached.

Bentley had sent on a supply of dynamite to Choba with their other stores, and often he had cause to regret that they had not a few cartridges with them, for in many places they had to make a mile or two of détour, when a charge or two of

dynamite would have cleared the way ahead satisfactorily. Curiously enough, throughout all their climbing it was not the actual hauling of the car upwards that presented the most difficulty and danger, but the prevention of accident by the bumping down after a particularly difficult bit had been surmounted. It was then that all their ingenuity had to be brought into play, for the sudden change from hauling upward to hauling back required a nicety of drill that at first was by no means forthcoming, and two or three times they had very narrow squeaks, very nearly seeing the car overturn and go rolling sideways down precipitous inclines.

Long before they had reached Choba, Wells was reconciled to the idea of shedding at any rate the greater part of their escort, for he soon discovered that their very number impeded progress instead of helping it.

The mules and camels, scrambling and slipping on ahead with the soldiers in between, blocked the path ahead and prevented their choosing their road for the car, till they were often right on to some narrow pass, which the animals had been able to squeeze through, but which was hopeless for the car. It was then a case of perhaps dropping the car backwards for a hundred yards or so and trying again at some other place.

The scenery, however, was glorious, the air beginning to be invigorating, and the nights actually cold. Water was again a little scarce, for although

they came to, several rain pools, the contents of these, after the mules, camels and men had worked their sweet will with them, were not appetizing, and, as Wells said, required a good deal of boiling before tea-making. Though liquid enough to drink, it was quite useless for washing purposes, so that was postponed till arrival at Choba.

They saw Choba lying among the hills quite a long time before they got there, as perhaps the worst part of the climb was the road up to the town.

They were still half a day off when a good many of the inhabitants came out to meet them, and among these Bentley was surprised to see an old friend, Mr. Wyatt, who, being at Choba on his way to Adis Ababa to audit the books of the Abyssinian Bank, on hearing of Bentley's advent, had come out to welcome him. Mr. Wyatt had left London nearly three months after the motorists, and his first words almost were to remark that he noticed they were not record breaking. During that afternoon he had an opportunity of judging what motoring was like in Abyssinia, and he observed that unless the Bank of Abyssinia required liquidating, it was hardly likely that he would still be in the capital when they arrived, as he did not think that he could spin his present job out more than a month or two.

Bentley put up with his good-natured chaff in consideration of the fact that he promised to rig

NEARING THE CAPITAL

The last 3,000 feet Showing some of our road-making.

My camp at Choba

them out completely, even if it was only for the sake of the sanitation of the town. He was as good as his word, for he was travelling with a small army of his own, and had shirts and every other requisite in quantity. He said that he would much have liked to have joined forces with them, but that though hitherto he had thought caravan travelling was the slowest mode of progression conceivable, he did not feel justified in the interests of his employers to sample any more of what motoring could be.

He left the next morning, promising to report all well at the capital, and taking letters both for the capital and for home.

At Choba they were in telephonic communication with Adis Ababa, and Bentley wished to communicate with Mr. T. B. Hohler, H. B. M. Chargé d'Affaires, to get news of the new spring brackets, which they expected by now would be at the capital, for they had sent a runner from the Monkey river back to Diredawa to Mr. Vorperian, asking him to cable at once.

It was impossible to think of presenting the car at the capital in its present condition, and there were signs that the other bracket was giving out.

They therefore determined, if possible, to either get something that would do made for them, or fashion two spring brackets themselves, if they could find any material that would suit and anything like a forge to work it on, in the event of the new brackets not having arrived.

They sent George nosing around, while Bentley was doing his best to respond to the greetings of the inhabitants. Atto Paulos, the Governor of the hilly provinces, was not present himself, as he was touring in the neighbourhood of Baltchi, a town farther up in the hills. Under the direct command of the Emperor, however, he had sent "Durgo," which is the Abyssinian state hospitality to travellers. This hospitality is no doubt a traditional custom of the country, and becomes embarrassing at times, for, being official, it is no doubt charged for against the state in the shape of reduction of taxes. Therefore the inhabitants are just as anxious, and more, to get rid of the hospitality than the traveller often is to receive it, for probably some little profit is squeezed out of the transaction.

The actual form it takes, after a few presents from the Governor himself, is a sort of pass, authorizing the traveller to collect or commandeer such "Durgo" as he may require; and in addition to such reduction of taxes as may be afterwards claimed when the bill for "Durgo" is presented, a small return civility in the shape of a present is looked for from the traveller himself. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Bentley hoped for as few villages as possible along his route, for the Abyssinian mind does not soar above sheep and bread and honey, and, of course, the ubiquitous "tej"; and he foresaw his arrival at the capital as a patriarch driving his herds before him if much "Durgo" went on on the road.

Bentley's chief relaxation was at the telephone, the director of which was a most courteous gentleman; though what linguistical qualifications he possessed that had fitted him for the post it was hard to discover. So far as Bentley could make out, he had graduated in French sufficiently to acquire a quite Parisian "Allo! Allo!" but there his knowledge of the tongue came to a full stop. Bentley spent a pleasant and smiling half-hour with him on the first occasion, trying to differentiate the pronunciation of the name of H. B. M. Chargé d'Affaires, "M. Hohler," from what the charming and smiling director pleased to interpret as the English version of his Parisian "Allo!" Bentley distinctly and with emphasis said "HOHLER," and the director nodded his head vigorously and rushed to the telephone and "Allo-ed!" vociferously, and then handed the receiver to Bentley, who found himself in communication with someone spluttering Amheric at the other end. He said "Hohler" quite distinctly several times through the telephone, and was answered through the wires with another volley of "Allo's!" his auditor evidently thinking he was not heard distinctly. Bentley put down the receiver with a smiling shake of the head, and, producing his note-book, printed in large letters, "M. Hohler, British Minister at Adis Ababa." The genial director took the paper, nodded his head, looked at it upside down for a full minute; and then pointed to the telephone wires and shook his head

with a smile. He evidently was pitying Bentley's ignorance in mistaking him for a telegraph operator. Bentley remembered the precept to go through Abyssinia laughing, and by this time they were both nearly obliged to sit down.

Fortunately, as he subsided into a chair, he caught sight of Wells and George mooning about, evidently waiting for his call to be over. He rushed out and caught hold of George, and dragged him into the office. A beam of comprehension presently overspread the director's happy face, and a quarter of an hour more went in voluble explanations as to the similarity of the Parisian "Allo" and the presumably Britannic "Halo," or "Hohler." It was evidently excruciatingly funny; such a joke had seldom come his way before, and he entirely forgot all about the fact that Bentley was waiting to get hold of M. Halo, or Hohler, till eventually, between peals of laughter, as he stopped for breath, George reminded him.

Then, with a celerity almost equal to the London Post Office, the genial director was evidently put into communication with everyone he did not happen to want, until he fumed and danced at the receiver, and said bad words in Amheric, which, Wells remarked, sounded good; until finally, perspiring at every pore, he handed the receiver once more to Bentley, this time with Mr. Hohler actually at the other end.

From him Bentley learned that the Emperor was

impatiently awaiting his arrival, and Mr. Hohler promised every assistance in his power; and throughout all their stay in the country our motorists had reason to gratefully acknowledge his kindly help. The spring brackets had been duly invoiced to the British Residency, but had somehow got lost on the road. They had arrived at Djibouti over a month before, but never seemed to have got as far as Diredawa. Inquiries were being made, and they would be sent on as soon as ever they turned up. As a matter of fact, they never did turn up, and their disappearance is still wrapped in mystery.

Mr. Hohler also gave them a detailed account of the happenings prior to the advent of George from the desert. It seemed that two of the boys of the last escort had managed to escape during the fighting, very badly wounded, and had finally dragged themselves to the depôt on the Hawash river, where one of them had died and the other had either raved or romanced as to the massacre of the whole expedition and the destruction of the car. The last depôt had therefore made the best of their way to Choba, and had sent the dire news on post haste to the capital.

Menelek was exceedingly wroth, and was preparing a punitive expedition, when George arrived at Choba with news that they were still safe.

Preparations were then hurried on for the relief, in the manner of all native African hurry, which means doing in a week what otherwise would take

a month, and what, in Europe, by spinning things out, might take half a day. Fortunately George found petrol still at Choba, and by himself talking to Mr. Hohler, at length received permission to pick up a small escort at Choba and be off. George was given mules and petrol; he found three friends, managed to lose his escort while they were preparing, and so arrived in time.

Mr. Hohler nearly drove Bentley frantic by saying that Menelek himself had seen to it that he was to have "Durgo" all along the route; but he also gave one or two useful hints as to how it was possible to get rid of most of it by a system of return gifts.

Finding that there was no hope of the new spring brackets, they set themselves to work in earnest to fashion substitutes. They poked their noses into every sort of place likely or unlikely, and were always greeted with a friendly grin, no matter what might be the nature of the domestic scene into which they intruded. At length they discovered two pieces of iron tie-bar, probably from some discarded camel-load on its way to the capital. Wells pounced on these and George haggled for them. The possessor evidently mistook them for bar gold at first; but George had taken upon himself a post a trifle higher than Menelek's Prime Minister, and explained that it was only his charity that allowed him to bestow the equivalent of fourpence by way of a gift, whereas he was fully empowered to seize the goods for nothing on the Emperor's service. The recipient of

the fourpence laughed heartily as he pocketed it, and was probably very glad to get rid of the old iron, which no doubt was not his at all. They slung a piece round the neck of each of two of their boys, and resumed their search for a forge. At length they happened upon a maker of camel saddles seated in his shop, at the back of which they could see a yard, from which came the sound of hammering on metal. They walked in in a body, and smilingly passed into the yard. There, to their delight, they saw quite an up-to-date anvil, with the trade mark of Messrs. Alldays and Onions, a well known Birmingham firm, and away in a corner, evidently but little used and rusty, an assortment of hammers. The native was tapping with a hammer of his own, evidently of the opinion that a number of light blows should be equivalent to one heavy one, if time was no object.

It took about two hours to get possession of that yard with its primitive furnace, and then the whole neighbouring population assembled to watch with awe the European Vulcans at work.

Wells confessed afterwards that he had known cooler jobs, but by the evening they had hammered out two brackets that were so satisfactory—for they did not skimp material—that they would not have taken the trouble to change them, even if the new ones had been forthcoming.

They said farewell to the proprietor of the forge, who laughed and felt their arms admiringly, and Wells

said he believed that he would have been ready to give them a job, for he looked somewhat contemptuously at his assistant, who had resumed his monotonous and feeble "tap, tap."

The next three days they spent in thoroughly overhauling the car and in looking at the mountainous ranges before them, that they had to get up somehow.

Bentley decided at length that twenty men and a dozen mules should suffice. He, therefore, with the assistance of the commander of Choba selected twenty men, whom he gathered were either soldiers or ex-soldiers. The mules he left to George, in his capacity of Prime Minister, and George purchased them eventually at market rate—at least, he took the mules and gave the market rate, which amounted to much the same thing and saved haggling. George had his own conception of the magic word "Durgo."

A photograph is reproduced of Bentley's armed boys, or some of them, and particular attention is called to the one seated, in a peaked cap, for his end later was sudden and dramatic.

At length, they were ready once more to make a start, and now the most arduous and dangerous part of their journey began. They soon found that such road as there was had better be left alone, for it was entirely useless for a car; and if ever they tried to work their way up it for a while they were certain to meet a caravan coming in the other direction, and this always with the choice of either

Some of my boys.

The road from Addis-Ababa to the Summer Palace

going back, perhaps for a quarter of a mile, or hanging the car over a precipice, if either was to pass the other.

The first thing to do was to get the mules thoroughly accustomed to the sound of the engine, for they foresaw that it would be a question of towing most of the way up, and that their twenty horse-power would have to be augmented by twelve mule-power very frequently.

Those who have had experience with mules may take it that the Abyssinian variety does not differ in essentials from those in other parts of the world. People say that in Art beauty lies in the unexpected; then surely a mule should be the most artistically beautiful thing in creation. As it was, those twelve mules gradually acquired for themselves nicknames, each one more opprobrious than the other; and when feeding-time came they would range up, the meekest and mildest set of blinking fools that it was possible to imagine, as though there was not such a thing as a vice among the lot.

Let this one point go to their credit, that they very soon familiarized themselves with the car to the extent that, when jibbing, they would allow themselves to be pushed forward by the radiator placidly, until the heat permeated through the hide, when they condescended to move sufficiently to escape the inconvenience. On the whole they rather preferred the towing, which was evidently a new experience; but that did not mean accelerated

marching; for having all pulled together like so many angels and got the car up a difficult and dangerous place, very likely the whole of the rest of the day would pass in a struggle to get them up the same pass with their loads, which had been taken off and left behind, and for which they were subsequently sent down. They were very lightly loaded, and at other times would skip about merrily under their loads and get far ahead if possible, so as to be well out of the way when wanted for towing.

They ate anything that was left within reach, and Wells declares to this day that he saw Beelzebub finishing off a stick of dynamite with great gusto.

So, with surveying a road ahead, blasting out of the way huge boulders, sometimes two or three times a day, cutting down trees, and levelling some sort of a path, they made progress, ever and ever upwards, as nearly in the direction they wished to go as was feasible. In this way, sometimes they made two or three miles a day, sometimes as many hundreds of yards, but ever fighting every foot.

The country was well wooded; cedar-trees were plentiful right up to the capital, and they noticed that the tropical vegetation around the Hawash was now gradually changing into the pine species. As yet their view ahead was bounded by the near mountains that they still had to work their way up; but behind them they could see the plains stretching for miles and miles. It was exhilarating mountaineer-

ing, and the hot sun was actually pleasant for an hour or so in the morning after the chilly nights.

It was during one of their enforced halts for camping that Bentley became aware for the first time of the Abyssinian purse. He noticed that although his soldiers had as yet done no firing of any sort, whenever they had been given leave of absence to visit a village *en route* their bandoliers looked emptier. They were particularly proud of these bandoliers and wore them constantly, in which harmless bit of vanity they had been allowed to indulge. He questioned George as to this disappearance of cartridges, and then learned that throughout Abyssinia cartridges are looked upon in the light of small change and form part of the currency of the country, and are recognized as the one-sixteenth part of a thaler. An amouli, or salt-bar, is accepted as from one-third to one-fifth of a thaler. The thaler itself seems to date from the year 1780, and to have been minted by one Maria Theresa in that year; in fact, that lady is as dead as Queen Anne, but her coins are still minted in Austria for the purposes of Abyssinian currency. Menelek himself has had great difficulty in persuading his subjects to accept his own face in place of the familiar one with its well-known rope of pearls, which the Abyssinian trader scrutinizes carefully to see if they are too much worn, in which case he rejects the coin with contempt. The value of the thaler fluctuates with the silver market of the world,

and also with the distance from the sea; it may be taken roughly at between one and elevenpence and two shillings and twopence, and the salt-bars and cartridges fluctuate with it.

After this Bentley took the precaution of counting the cartridges in each man's bandolier, and debiting any lost one at the value of one-sixteenth of a thaler from his pay. The cartridges then seemed to be glued to the bandoliers.

The boys, on the whole, behaved admirably, and did not seem to realize that climbing and lugging the car up mountains was servile labour. They looked upon it evidently as a sort of military campaigning, and several of them had had a good deal of the same sort of work to do after the Italian campaign, when it was necessary to drag the captured guns up to Adis Ababa. These guns Bentley saw later in the city, where some of them are used for saluting purposes. The men explained that the car was better than a gun, for it was capable of moving at times by itself and even offering some sort of assistance to the towing.

The nights were quite cold now, and they were glad of huge camp fires, and more glad that they seemed gradually to be leaving their old acquaintances the hyenas behind; but their place seemed very satisfactorily filled by armies of monkeys, especially the dog-headed baboon, who seemed everywhere, and there was hardly a nook or cranny that was not topped by an inquisitive face, for the

whole tribe seemed of a very inquiring turn of mind.

Bully sat in the car in speechless indignation, turning his head rapidly from side to side, then backwards and forwards, getting more and more furious all the while. This escort of baboons was with them the whole way up to the capital, and though the others grew in time to ignore them, Bully never got used to them; they were always fresh to him, always a lot of inquisitive nobodies who had no business to be there.

As a sample of their daily journeying one day may be described, before they reached the Gibbi river, which flows at an altitude of nearly six thousand feet, and which they hoped to reach before they were quite worn out, for water was again becoming scarce, as such rain-pools as they found were dry. It may be mentioned here that water in many places is part of "Durgo," the general country being so dry.

On the day we speak of, they struck camp in the early dawn, just as the sun was appearing. They had camped among the trees on a gradient of about one in five, and had as usual taken the precaution of lashing the car to two trees to ease the brakes. The ground was partly loose and soft, partly rocky, and the mode of progression was as follows: Bentley and Wells first inspected the road ahead for about one hundred yards. If the ground seemed firm enough, after being levelled a little, to allow of towing, the mules were inspanned and the twenty men given

side-ropes to hold, so that their combined weight might prevent the car from toppling over, for they were obliged to zig-zag up the slopes. One hundred yards, perhaps two, might be covered in this manner, and then their way would be blocked, either by some huge boulder or a sudden rise of gradient. If it was a boulder that they could not go round, or more likely a rocky ledge extending for hundreds of yards on either side, the two white men would anchor the car, and sending the natives back for the mule-loads, would wander about until they found a spot where a charge of dynamite would clear a gap, that they could afterwards level sufficiently to warp the car up it on to the higher level. This necessitated perhaps an hour or more of hammering on the drill until they had made the hole for the cartridge deep enough into the rock. They then had to see that the whole party and car were well out of the danger zone, and then return to light the fuse. Sometimes the first blasting was successful and split the rock upwards as intended. Sometimes it was too effective, and left an abrupt face more difficult than before, and all the work had to be begun again.

Anyway, there would be a deal of pick and spade work before they could attempt to warp the car through the aperture. They then fixed the shackles to any tree or rock that was handy, and harnessed all the mules and the men to the car, except those men who were told off to keep the ropes to the shackles

taut. In this way the car would be dragged sometimes very nearly perpendicularly upwards for eight or nine feet before it was once more on the normal gradient of the hill. Then the mule-trappings had to be sent for again, the tools packed up, and they considered themselves lucky if the engine could be started and perhaps a quarter of a mile of crawling and bumping at first speed was possible before the next enforced stop. This would in all likelihood prove to be a crevasse or ravine, with high sloping sides, and now they had to lower the car by ropes to the bottom, and then hitch all the tackle on once more, to fight inch by inch up the other side on ground that offered no foothold and crumbled away beneath the weight of the wheels. It was in moments like this that the uncertainty of the mulish temper rendered them ever on the verge of disaster, and over and over again they had reason to be thankful for the precaution they invariably took of fastening strong brake ropes to the shackles, and telling two men off to each rope to keep them always taut. Otherwise half-way up a dangerous slope a mule would suddenly jib, and his example would immediately be followed by one or two more. Without the restraining shackle-ropes the car would at once have gathered momentum backwards, and would have ended by dragging the struggling mules in a heap with it. In these cases the application of the whip was absolutely useless; they merely had to wait until the refractory mules had reasoned it out

that, after all, a pull up of another few feet was better than remaining perched in a clump at an acute angle with a motionless car behind them, to which they remained attached and were likely to so remain till they had made a move.

Sometimes it took ten minutes, sometimes an hour, for them to reach this frame of mind, and then, without warning, they would set to work with a will, helped, it must be confessed, once they were on the move again, by a few encouraging reminders. Then possibly would come something that almost looked like a road, and which was no doubt a path trodden by countless millions of baboons since the world was young. Along this they would go fairly merrily, for in places it would be quite broad and smooth, but they soon found that the baboon does not trouble to avoid difficult places, and that the merest ledge of rock overhanging a sheer precipice is considered quite good enough on occasion. Indeed, once the party found themselves in a predicament that necessitated their taking the car along one of these baboon ledges. The path along which they had come suddenly came to a full-stop at a point where there was solid rock surmounted by trees to the left, to the height of twenty feet, while to the right there seemed nothing but blank space. There were about two and a half feet of ledge round the rocky corner, and then the path widened once more. Bentley and Wells scaled the rocky wall and looked about them. It meant perhaps the loss of two or

three days, perhaps more, to go back the way they had come and look for a different route over the hill instead of round. The mules could easily find their way along the narrow ledge, but the car was a different thing. There were, as has been said, trees above the rocky ledge, and these were stout trees. The space to be traversed was not more than about thirty feet, something like twice the length of the car, and Bentley determined to have a try.

They made their way up the wall again, and drew the tackle and stout ropes after them. First of all, they made the experiment on firm soil. That is, they chose three stout trees near to each other and fastened the tackle to these, and three ropes to the outside of the car. They then measured the distance the car had to traverse, and by tightening the ropes lifted the near wheels from the ground. Then harnessing mules to the car, they practised towing with the near wheels in the air, till they were sure of being able to traverse the requisite distance without mishap. Having arrived so far, they unshipped the tackles and chose three other trees right over the precipice and rigged them as before. They sent the mules and all paraphernalia over the ledge, and then had a friendly wrangle as to who should drive the car. Wells at length won the day, for he argued that the man directing the ropes had far and away the greater responsibility in case of accident; and, moreover, that if he took the precaution of tying a fourth light rope round his middle, in case of any-

thing happening, he would be left dangling, and could be hauled up afterwards. It was a somewhat anxious time, as the ledge was by no means either smooth or perfectly horizontal, and at one time the wheels in space dipped ominously as the towing and tightening of the ropes did not synchronize. However, a very few minutes saw Wells safe on four wheels again, and Bentley wiped the perspiration from his brow. His had after all been the most anxious task.

They had a rest and a meal after this, and as though for a reward, they found that for nearly half a day the monkey road proved about the easiest bit of travelling they had had. It is true they had to tow a great deal of the way, and had a serious altercation with quite an army of baboons, who had a good deal to say as they sat ahead of them, and then loped off, as the car approached, with their ungainly shamble, to sit down and protest again another hundred yards farther on. Fortunately their feelings were too hurt for them to remember to sling stones, which is their usual habit when annoyed.

Such may be taken as an average of their daily toil, sometimes better, sometimes worse, while the big mountains, that were their ultimate goal, seemed ever to recede further as they conquered hill after hill.

CHAPTER XIII

Jildid—A lesson—Tragical consequence—A black bog—Christmas Day—Better travelling—A sportsman's paradise—Gallas—Kaffas—And Gourakis—The Gibbi river—Arrival at the outposts of the plains round the capital.

SINCE leaving Choba, George, who as has been said, had assumed the post of Pre-Prime Minister to Menelek, in addition to his other various offices, had complained of overwork in the kitchen department. A muster of all hands was called and the qualifications of each for the post of under-chef inquired into. One named Jildid, of the peaked cap, to whom attention has been called before, had already proved himself to be quite the most useless of the lot at any kind of work, and, moreover, he professed that he had been to England as steward on a ship. The magnificence of this lie caused it to pass uncontradicted, and Jildid had indeed probably travelled, for he subsequently proved to have all the European vices, in addition to many native varieties. However, he could not possibly be a worse cook than he was worker, so he was duly installed as George's assistant. His great forte was the making of coffee, and certainly he had a way of his own that improved upon George's method of

mixing sand and sugar and coffee grounds in equal proportions in luke-warm water, and stirring them up with a spoon.

But Jildid must have been suffering, for he found his way to the medicinal bottle of whisky, the contents whereof Bentley noticed were gradually disappearing. Now neither Bentley nor Wells ever touched whisky, except perhaps in moments of dire necessity, and George was above suspicion. Jildid alone, besides them, had access to the tabooed bottle. Therefore did Bentley and Wells, after consultation with the medical book and medicine chest, insert certain condiments in the remainder of the whisky and wait results.

That evening Jildid did not appear to officiate at table, and was discovered tied up in a knot under a tree and apostrophizing his Maker.

Subsequently George, instructed by Bentley, pointed the moral while Bentley adorned his tale with a few punctuation marks, and there, as far as the white men were concerned, the matter ended.

The next day was a particularly arduous one. Three times they had to lower the car again after surmounting almost impassable defiles, till it was out of the danger zone, while they blasted away huge rocks that barred their way. It had been a question not so much of towing, but of actually lifting the car up the enormous steps of a natural stairway, and in the evening every one was absolutely worn out. Bentley and Wells therefore turned in

without troubling about further dinner than a snack of tinned beef washed down with a sip of cold tea.

This probably saved their lives, for there was no cooking that night. If there had been, George would have been much too weary to keep his eyes open as he did the next night.

The next day was a comparatively easy one, for not only did they strike a couple of plateaus, which enabled them to make fairly good progress without much towing and lifting, but rather early in the evening they came to a defile that promised at least a day's work to get through, so Bentley called a halt, and told all hands to get a good night's rest, so as to be ready for the work ahead.

Several men asked leave of absence for an hour or two, and Jildid among them, and Bentley let them go, after re-counting their bandoliers.

That night they allowed themselves the luxury of a tin of boiled fowl, followed by liquid jelly, and were lighting their pipes, filled with real tobacco, which Mr. Wyatt had given them, and were again remarking how good it was after the dried tea-leaves they had been reduced to in the desert, when George rushed in with an expression on his face that Wells told him to take off at once as it spoilt his digestion.

But George whispered hurriedly in Bentley's ear not to drink the coffee that night.

Bentley merely nodded his head and George disappeared.

When Jildid came in a few minutes later as usual with the coffee, Bentley stood up, and, taking one of the cups, offered it to the man and made a sign to him to drink it.

Jildid dashed it out of his hand and made a bolt for the open, but Wells tripped him up and pinioned him by the arms.

What followed was as unexpected to the two Englishmen as no doubt it was to the rest of the party, whom Bentley caused to be summoned by George. They thought that, probably, the man was trying to play a little tit for tat for the doctored whisky, but were far from expecting the tragedy that ensued.

Bentley addressed the men, and said that he had reason to suspect that Jildid had put something in the coffee that he had prepared for them, and that he had already upset one cup rather than drink it. The men nodded acquiescence when he asked them if they did not think it was fair that Jildid should drink what he himself had offered them to drink.

The cup was again offered, and Jildid refused, and spat on the ground.

Bentley ordered two men to hold him and lay him down on his back. He then, none too gently, opened his mouth and poured the contents of the cup down his throat.

The wretched poisoner struggled and choked, and almost immediately after swallowing the coffee, although released, seemed too weak to rise, and

his body began to swell in a disgusting manner. How quickly he died they could not tell, for after one or two convulsive gasps he lay motionless, though he still continued to swell and swell, till he lost all semblance of a man and his body became merely a puffy heap of bloated, livid flesh.

The onlookers watched in horrified silence; even the natives, to whom such a sight was probably no novelty, looked disturbed and anxiously one at the other. They were evidently wondering if the white man's just anger would be sufficiently appeased by the retribution visited upon the offender.

Wells had long ago turned his head away, when Bentley signed to the men to carry the body out of the tent. This they did reluctantly, evidently not caring to touch the poisoned flesh.

Bentley, who, when he has time, is a good Catholic, hurriedly made the sign of the cross, with a little shudder.

Wells went for a stroll to cool his nerves; death had been very close to them all along, and they had grown more or less accustomed to looking for him, but never in such repulsive garb as they had just witnessed.

Poor George was very upset, he could not get over the responsibility that would have fallen on his shoulders should the worst have happened, and all the encomiums that were showered on him for his vigilance failed to dispel the vision of himself being asked by Menelek to account for the death of his masters.

Wells presently returned from his short walk, with Bully, as ever, at his heels. Bully, throughout the scene, had been an interested but unmoved spectator. Death by poison did not convey much to his doggy mind, but he had noticed that his friend Wells was upset, so he had waddled off to see that he came to no harm. Wells was still very pale, so Bentley opened a new bottle of whisky, and they each had a good stiff tot before lying down, and Bentley got out paper and pen and wrote a full account of the happening, which they both signed. He intended to present this to the authorities immediately on arrival, to prevent any garbled version getting about.

The camp was astir earlier than usual the following morning, for Bentley did not want more talk than necessary concerning the tragedy of the night before.

He was almost thankful that the defile ahead proved one of the stiffest they had yet encountered, for it kept the men busy all day, and at night they were glad enough to forget everything but their weariness.

Three days more of incessant toil brought them to Christmas Day, but seemingly no nearer the Gibbi river. Christmas Eve also brought them to a black bog, into which the foremost mule floundered and stuck as though he had been glued, and they had considerable difficulty in extracting him. He finally came out with a plop, like a cork out of a bottle,

Cleaning up our last camp before reaching the capital.

Gun taken from the Italians at battle of Adowa and used to signal our approach to the capital

Troops coming out to escort us into capital.

bringing about half a ton of gelatinous black mud with him. The bog was too wide to bridge with planks, and altogether required investigating, so, considering all things and the fact that next day was Christmas Day, Bentley decided on calling a halt for a full holiday.

They slept late, therefore, the next morning, the first time they had allowed themselves that luxury since entering the country, and, after breakfast, Wells and Bully strolled off together, and Bentley took the opportunity of doing some writing. In spite of his long night's rest, he fell asleep over it, and woke after several hours to find his nose in the ink-pot and his limbs cramped.

He heard Wells outside in confidential conversation with Bully, and rising with a yawn and a stretch, he carefully put away the blank page before him and went out to see what was going on.

He found Wells, George and Bully, all with beaming faces and very hot, surrounding an improvised table, on which was spread a veritable feast; while in the centre was a diminutive deodar tree, decked out with what looked like candles and various odds and ends from the stores.

On seeing Bentley, Wells said with a suspicion of a grin, "We were just going to call you, sir. We did not like to disturb your writing before."

Bentley, conscious of a large black smear on his nose, allowed the remark to pass in dignified silence, and, having wasted a few cartridges' worth of water

in trying vainly to remove the stain, sat down to the festive dinner.

Afterwards, Wells, as usual, entertained the camp with music and conjuring, and he had made somewhat elaborate preparations, for he said that he had noticed that by now the party had begun to realize that the one-time miraculous car had its limitations, and that therefore a belief in its powers required a little revivifying. He therefore had turned it for the occasion into a galvanic battery and had buckets of water ready, with one handle reposing in the water. A thaler was duly presented to one of the escort together with the other handle of the battery. The thaler, after being well examined, was dropped into the bucket and the gallant soldier invited with a smile to take it out, when it should become his own property. The resulting contortions afforded infinite amusement to the rest of the party, and each man considered it extremely funny until it came to his own turn to try.

Finally, as a wind-up, Wells set the whole lot dancing in a ring by sending a shock through them as they held hands.

Although no one had succeeded in winning the thaler, Bentley presented them each with one of those coins in memory of the Christian Great Day, and then dismissed them, with the admonition that the less tej drunk that night the better, for they had a hard day's work before them.

And a hard day's work it proved to be—in fact,

two days of incessant shovelling—for they found that the only way to pass that hole of concentrated gelatinous black ooze was to dig a path through it, and they were thankful for small mercies when they found that its consistency was sufficient to retain the sides of the path in place, at any rate, until they should have run the car through, when, no doubt, it would gradually silt down to a level again.

What this curious formation in the nature of a solid bog was, and how it had come there, did not interest them so much as the fact that it was there and had to be got through. It fortunately was not more than three feet deep at the deepest part, and at the end of the second day they were able to drive the mules through the ditch they had made and then tow the car after them.

This was fortunately the last incident of what they had grown to realize as really bad travelling. They soon arrived at more undulating country, for they were practically at the top of the first range of hills, and although the undulations were still always upwards, the gradients were never nearly so steep. They now came to scattered huts and even villages on the slopes; these, they learnt, belonged to members of the Galla tribe, one of the numerous different races of which Ethiopia is formed, now under the rule of the Lion of Judah. The men, women and children showed the same friendly interest in the party as the rest of the inhabitants of Abyssinia, but as now they were reduced to

about the same status of locomotion as an African trek wagon, the marvellous powers of the automobile were not sufficiently apparent to cause much wonder and dismay.

They were now high enough for the view to become panoramic, and range after range of high mountains showed marvellous blue tints in the distance, while they could see in the midst of fairly flat country, one large round hill that rose in curious isolation.

The country was still teeming with game, and now that they had time to look around, and could often see down into the valleys for miles, the glasses brought tempting sights close to them. Twice Bentley saw elephants crushing through the timber, and on several occasions, when passing the peculiarly transparent thorn-bushes that the rhinoceros choses as its habitat of predilection, he saw three or four of those ponderous and ungainly brutes rooting about like so many huge hogs. To hunt them was out of the question, they had neither time nor suitable weapons. Antelopes of all kinds were still abundant, as also were leopards. The villagers took them often for a hunting-party and so were in the habit of bringing news such as other travellers had always been delighted to receive. Wells was now fast developing into a good game shot, and he was as keen as mustard, so sometimes in the evening they took it in turns to sit up over kills, when news was brought to them of such as seemed likely to offer

a chance of a return of the leopard or lion. They got three more fine leopards in this way, and Wells, one evening, while walking towards a kill, got a shot at a lion unexpectedly at about a hundred yards and rolled him over. He got up, however, and made off, and although the whole party lost half of the next day in following up the blood spoor, they never saw him again, much to Wells' chagrin.

About this time, they came across their first water-buck, and got two fine specimens; in fact, the hardest thing about the trip now was the privation from sport, which offered itself in a most tempting manner daily. They solaced themselves, however, by the thought of the return journey, when they would have got rid of the car, and when time would be no object.

Amid beautiful scenery and over country which at first they would have considered impossible, but which, after what they had already conquered, seemed fairly easy, they made good progress, until finally they actually came upon the Gibbi river, suddenly and unexpectedly, when they had begun to believe that it was only a myth and did not exist at all.

They first of all began to suspect its vicinity by entering some very dense vegetation on almost flat land, and they had hardly cut their way well into this, than they saw the river before them.

The river is some twenty-five to thirty yards across, and, in the dry season, never more than a few inches deep, and therefore fordable. But the bed

is full of innumerable boulders, and, in order that the car might cross, hundreds of these had to be carried or levered out of the way.

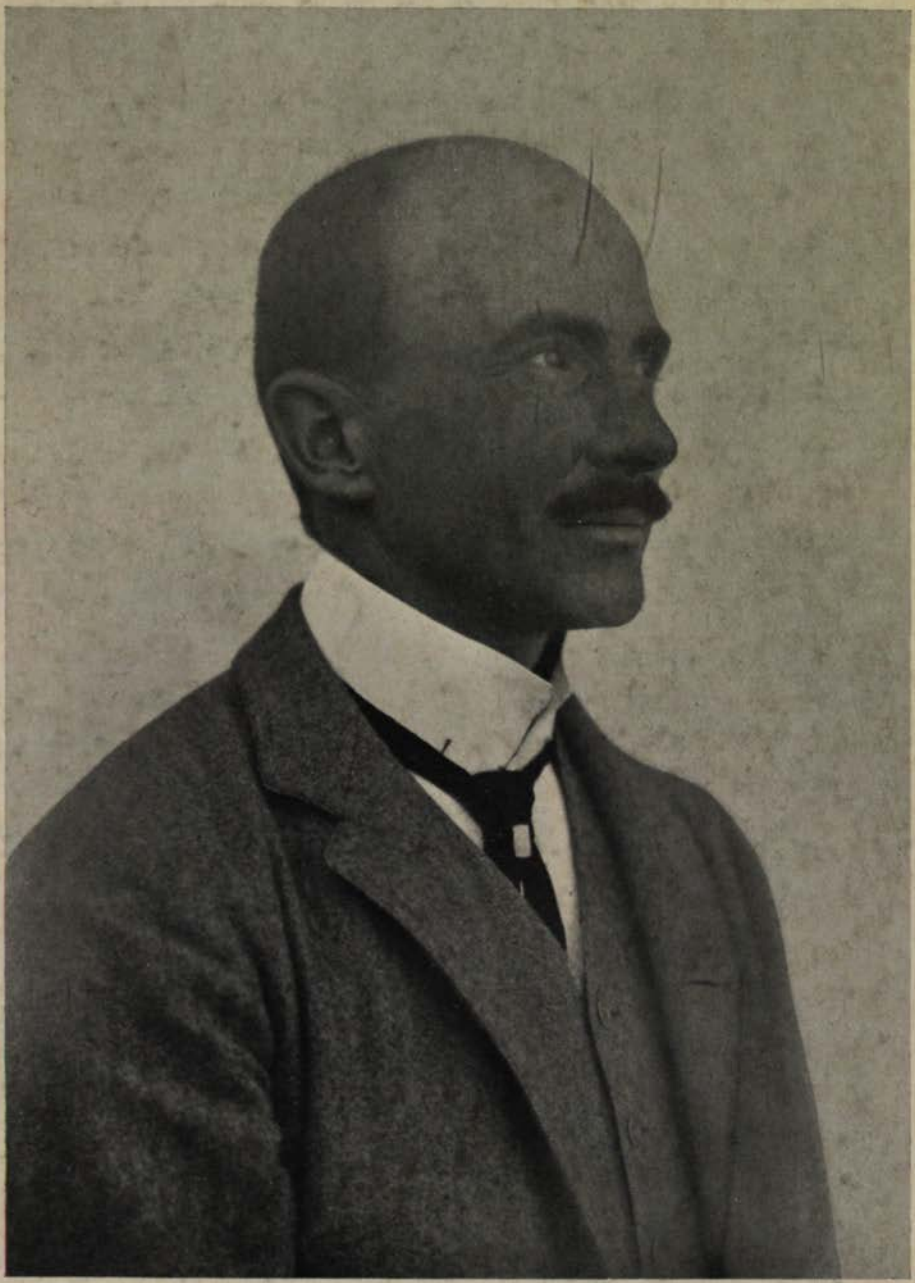
While they were at this work, many inhabitants of the surrounding country, as usual, came to inspect the car.

George explained who they were, and George, when given licence to talk, was a sort of perambulating encyclopædia. From him they learnt that some of their visitors—handsome Egyptian-looking men, with very pretty, almost fair, women with them—were Gourakis, or the Mohammedans of Abyssinia, the bulk of the population being Copts. Bentley learnt afterwards that there are large numbers of these in the country, and they form the most intelligent part of the population.

Other visitors George declared to be Kaffa, or Galla folk, and all were very friendly and apparently much interested.

Bentley learnt that, from here, he was practically in touch with the capital, and so he sent runners on to Mr. Hohler, telling him his whereabouts, and that, according as the intervening country turned out to be, so might he be expected in days or weeks. He asked that supplies of petrol might be sent to meet him as soon as he reached the edge of the plateau that surrounds the capital. Up to that point, thanks to the amount of towing they had been obliged to do, he had still sufficient in the car and on his mules.

They were told that, some miles to the left of



ADDIS-ABABA.

Mr. T. B. Hohler, H.B.M.'s Chargé d'Affaires, who introduced the car to the Emperor.

ADDIS-ABABA.

Emperor Menelek leaving Palace to inspect the car. (See page 263.)

them, a caravan road ran towards the capital, and, therefore, once they had cut themselves out of the dense vegetation surrounding the river, they made their way diagonally across country to strike this road; for even if they did not actually make use of it, because of the probably crowded traffic, and the impossibility of using dynamite when wanted, it would at any rate direct them to the guard-house, to which they had asked that their petrol might be sent.

After the Gibbi river the going was really appreciably easier, and at times they were actually able to leave their mules behind for a short distance, and had the pleasure of waiting for them at the next difficult spot. After two days' travelling, a runner reached them from Mr. Hohler, who told them that orders had been passed that all traffic was to make way for them, and saying that they would find the road, as it neared the plateau, fairly passable. They therefore struck the road as soon as possible, and one day of spasmodic lurching and bumping, towing and levering, finally saw them in the evening in sight of Adis Ababa, and in the midst of a small army of soldiers.

This, they learnt, was a military outpost, or Customs guard, slightly augmented in their honour. Whatever their duty was, there were, as Wells said, "A rare lot of them." Indeed, thenceforward, the predominant impression was the immense number of inhabitants generally, and every second man seemed to be a soldier.

CHAPTER XIV

First sight of Adis Ababa—The plains—Letters from the capital—Preparations for the final stage—Menelek sends an escort—Official reception—Banquet at the British Residency—Menelek impatient to see the car.

THE officer in command of the post came out to greet them, and a good many of the soldiers, who were aimlessly hanging around, seemed to put themselves into some sort of formation, and to go through certain antics that were presumably intended for a salute.

After shaking hands with quite a number of gentlemen with shields, by which token they had already learned to recognize an officer, Bentley had time to attend to the letters that were handed to him.

Among quite a number of congratulatory notes from the various Ministries, there was a letter from Mr. Hohler, explaining that there would be an official reception on his arrival by the members of all the Legations, and a dinner afterwards at the British Residency. He was asked to start as soon as possible, and to send a runner off at once, to say the time that he might be expected.

Bentley wrote that he would be ready to start in the morning, and handed his note to the com-

mander for immediate delivery. Then leaving the car where it was for the moment, he and Wells, accompanied by the commander and two or three score of officers, and followed by as many hundreds of the soldiers as could drag themselves from the fascination of the car, walked on a little to a point whence they could obtain a better view of the town, which had been their goal for the last seven strenuous months.

They gazed for some minutes in silence on the scene before them. Wide plains stretched at their feet, crossed and re-crossed by broad roads. Along these roads isolated houses and huts were dotted, and there were houses scattered all over the plains, surrounded by clumps of vegetation. The plains themselves were neither bare nor densely afforested; there were plenty of trees, but they grew mostly singly, though here and there were small woods and coppices.

Many streams flowed over the plain, and it could be seen that several of them flowed right through the town of Adis Ababa, which lay in the centre of the plains.

From the distance at which they were, the town looked like an assemblage of low-lying huts, for even the Palace and the various European Residencies do not rise far from the ground, and are merely glorified examples of native architecture, which, in its primitive state, consists of a lattice-work frame plastered with mud and crowned with

a thatched roof. They could see the numerous straggling streets of these native houses, and distinguish the Palace by its size, and here and there see larger buildings which were no doubt the foreign Residencies. They also could make out several buildings, which looked like, and indeed were, churches, and in the neighbourhood of the Palace could be seen what looked like a few factory chimneys.

All around there were numerous canvas tents, and broad roads and streams divided the town into a number of segments.

Though it was nearly sunset, there were still huge bodies of men at work on the roads, and in the centre of the nearest mass they could make out what was either a traction engine or steam roller.

In the distance the horizon line was broken by the peaks of ranges of mountains that showed all the colours of the rainbow in the light of the setting sun.

"Well, here we are, Wells," said Bentley at length, with a pardonable touch of pride in his voice.

"Yes, sir; and it seems as though we are not going to be exactly lonesome either," answered Wells, as he surveyed the teeming multitudes. "I'd have preferred going in by the back door of the garage, until we could get into a new rig-out," he added, surveying his tattered form in disgust. "We're hardly figged out to call on royalty, as you might say; and the car wouldn't be any the worse for a clean."

Bentley laughed, perhaps the first really con-

Red pepper sellers in the market place, Addis-Ababa.

ADDIS-ABABA.

The wood market

tented laugh for months, and promised Wells that he should have plenty of time to titivate before being presented to the Emperor.

They returned to the car, for they still had before them the task of stripping off the indiarubber and hide casing from the tyres that were on the wheels, and fitting new tyres with pneumatic tubes, before starting on the excellent roads now before them.

They found that a large tent had been put at their disposal, guarded by an Abyssinian sentry. Bentley did not like to refuse the courtesy, though Wells said that he had an aversion to making new acquaintances. He said that by now he seemed to know the various inmates of their own little tent almost by name, and he averred that they had become quite civil and obliging, with regular hours for meals, which had taken a lot of training to accomplish. Bentley consoled him by saying that they need no longer be sparing with Keating's powder, as they were within reach of fresh supplies; so he peppered everything within reach copiously, even the head of the Abyssinian guard outside the tent, while that functionary was gazing in an awed manner at Bully, who was investigating the portion of black leg that protruded from the flowing white robes.

They stripped the tyres, and their rubber required some hacking to get off, but it had done its work well, and they would never have reached the capital without it.

Before they lay down to rest the car was on new

pneumatic tyres, the engine spotlessly clean, and in excellent running order, and the car, except for sundry scratches on the paint and a couple of patches in the hood, and a slightly crumpled wing, really quite presentable.

All stores and ropes, shovels and picks, tins and bottles were now finally discarded. A great deal they proposed to leave behind, and told George to administer it as largesse among their trusty boys, who had instructions to follow on to the capital with the mules and rifles and ammunition boxes, and such goods as they deemed worth packing up.

Whether it was the effect of the Keating's, or fatigue, or the sense of a finality to their labours and security at last, once they curled up to sleep they neither of them woke till the sun was already high in the heavens.

Wells jumped up first, and peeping out of the fly of the tent, saw that the whole plain as far as the eye could reach seemed covered with a seething, chattering, shuffling crowd, mostly armed with rifles.

"A little bodyguard, sent to escort us to the capital, I suppose," said Bentley, who joined him.

They then realized that the shuffling, which appears to be the Abyssinian equivalent for cheering or hand-clapping, was in their honour, and brought forth by their appearance at the fly of the tent. They responded suitably, and then shouted for George, who explained that it was already nine

o'clock, and that the army had been patiently waiting since sunrise for their awakening.

As they had already waited four or five hours, Bentley thought that another half-hour, while they breakfasted, would not be missed, and so they washed and made themselves as presentable as possible, shaving as much of their faces as they could get at between wrinkles, breakfasted, and then went to bid farewell to the genial commander and his numerous officers.

Then the car came up, with Wells driving and George seated beside him—a car dancing over the hard road on pneumatic tyres and ready to spring forward in answer to a touch on the throttle. No longer a crawling trek waggon, no longer an encumbrance and a care, but once more a willing servant and an emblem of the power of the white man. All this was reflected in the happy faces of Wells and George, and Bentley and Bully sprang into the body and seated themselves simultaneously on the back cushions, and they were off.

But alas! for hopes; their progress was destined to be as slow as when climbing the steepest passes, for gesticulate as they might, Wells found it impossible to make a way through the masses in front.

It was not because those immediately in the way did not do their very best to get out of the way, for they did, with terror-stricken faces; but those behind were anxious to see, and they kept the hapless front ranks tight against the car as sardines in a box.

The shuffling and jabbering steadily increased; they were evidently making a success, but no progress. Wells was finally obliged to stop altogether, while the mob in front shuffled and jabbered and smiled, till the occupants of the car were fairly seething with rage.

For a full half-hour they sat there in the broiling sun, making occasional forward movements at the rate of the Lord Mayor's show, when to his delight Bentley saw a troop of cavalry, some two thousand strong, forcing its way in no too gentle a manner towards the car. Your native all the world over is never noted for his tender care of his fellow-natives, especially if they happen to be in a subordinate position, and it is only after the advent of the white man that those same subordinates gradually learn to cry out over indignities that they accept without murmur from their own colour. There is no doubt that if Wells had been an Abyssinian, the car would have got through that crowd, or the crowd would have known the reason why, in the shape of a few broken legs and arms. Wells was considerate, not so the arriving horsemen. It was a cavalry charge pure and simple, and the crowd melted before it. Bentley foresaw what would happen as soon as the front rank horses caught sight of the car, and he whispered to Wells to be ready for the psychological moment with his hand on the horn and his finger on the throttle. Consequently, the moment the last of the crowd fled, leaving about thirty yards between

Hotel in Addis-Ababa, built by the Queen. The car has been washed for the first time since it left Europe.

Typical Abyssinian house. Wells and Bully trying to get out of the sun

the first horsemen and the car, Wells started the engine racing at second speed, the while he blew blast after blast on the horn. This was quite enough for the horses, the front ranks wheeled and stampeded in terror, communicating their fright in a flash to the whole troop. There was no hesitation or delay, and the gallant escort found themselves on the way back to Adis Ababa considerably more rapidly than they had come.

"Keep it up, Wells! Biff into them from the rear!" shouted Bentley; and Bully, in the exhilaration of the chase, gave out a series of ear-splitting shrieks that added to the pandemonium.

On an easy down gradient, an affrighted horse can go speedily, but not more speedily than a twenty-horse-power car on the same gradient.

Let it be said at once that the Abyssinian cavalrymen ride well—at any rate, in the matter of sticking on; whether the terror of the horses was shared by their riders it was impossible to say, for the horses required no further urging than that supplied by Wells and Bully. It was undoubtedly the finest ride that any of them had ever had, a sort of glorified fox-hunting, and the space between them and the capital was rapidly being eaten up, when the cavalry ahead suddenly divided into two halves, and scattered over the plains on either side, leaving an open road. Wells had to ease down, for otherwise he would have gone plump into an imposing procession that was advancing from the town. The

reception at Diredawa was as nothing to this, either in numbers or magnificence, and Wells stopped the car abruptly, for this was a concourse evidently not to be treated with the same lack of ceremony as the unfortunate cavalry.

There were many gentlemen in splendid European uniforms riding on horses, each surrounded by an escort. There were a multitude of silver-shielded personages on gorgeously bedizened mules, and the whole procession was flanked and followed by countless rifle-bearing white figures.

The animal part of the cavalcade showed a disinclination to approach even the stationary car too closely, so a good portion of the notabilities dismounted and came on on foot. Bentley alighted from the car and walked to meet them. Bully was about to follow, when with a crash and an echoing boom—boom—boom—boom, a fairly large piece of artillery spoke. Bully never did like thunderstorms, so he elected the privacy of under the seat in the car in preference to a walk, and Bentley went on alone, wondering if he was important enough to be addressed as "Mr. Bentley, I presume."

Mr. Hohler, the representative of his own nation, came forward and shook hands warmly first, and then introduced him to Menelek's uncle and official representative, Ras Waldo Gorgis, and then to the various representatives of the Powers, who had ridden out to meet him. Having shaken hands with each of these, he was introduced and shook hands with

a vast number of Abyssinian gentlemen without catching their names.

At length Mr. Hohler suggested a move onwards to the town, and Bentley offered him a seat in the car. While the other notabilities were returning to their horses, which still refused to be brought to them, Mr. Hohler got into the car and incidentally made the acquaintance of Bully, who was still in retirement under the removable front seat, by treading on his tail. Bully was annoyed at first, but seeing Bentley behind the aggressor, he said: "Never mind, old chap," in the usual delightful manner of dogs, which places them so immeasurably above human beings in like circumstances, and a warm friendship began between him and the British Legation from that moment.

Bentley suggested that, judging from the experience with the cavalry, it would be as well if the escort followed the car to the town instead of preceding it. Mr. Hohler thought that this was probably a good idea, and sent his orderly to advise the Ras to draw the cavalcade up in two halves, well away from the road, before the car started.

This was done, and then the car started, and the escort followed with such speed as they could.

They reached the capital amid masses of troops congregated on either side of the road, while behind the troops evidently the whole town had turned out to see the show.

The cannon were still booming, Bentley did not

count the shots, but felt that he must be either a crowned head or a field marshal at least, if they were all in his honour.

On the way Mr. Hohler offered the hospitality of the Legation; he said that everyone in the town, from the Emperor downwards, would be glad to put them up; or that if, after his arduous journey, he would prefer privacy, the Emperor said that the new hotel, just completed, and not even quite furnished, which had every European convenience, and which was still empty, was entirely at Bentley's disposal during his stay.

Bentley chose the hotel, pleading the necessity of trying to recuperate as much as possible.

Mr. Hohler asked Wells to stop a moment, beckoned to his orderly, and sent him off at full gallop to the town with orders that all the luggage, which had arrived for Bentley and Wells, should be immediately sent to the hotel from the Legation, where it had been stored.

When at length they arrived at the hotel, they found that there was a large compound at the back, and into this they drove the car, and left it guarded by a few thousand officers and soldiers.

"Mind yer car, sir?" murmured Wells to himself, as he stopped the engine and vacated his seat.

Bentley promised to be at the Legation as soon as he had had a bath and a change, and after Mr. Hohler had ridden off, they went and revelled in a bath each,

and stayed there until their belongings arrived about an hour afterwards.

They then arrayed themselves once more in civilized garments, and surveyed themselves in the large mirrors with which the hotel was plentifully provided.

"Oh, my mammy!" ejaculated Wells, when he saw his face, for as long as their clothes had matched their faces, the *tout ensemble* had been harmonious; now the newness of their clothes accentuated the age of their faces. "How old did I tell you I was, sir? Well, it was a lie. I made a mistake. I was born sometime B.C.," and Wells bent his back and mouthed at his reflection, as though in the last stages of decrepitude.

"It has aged us a bit, I admit," answered Bentley, running the tip of his finger over a row of wrinkles, much as a boy might a stick along a London railing. "It's hard to believe that these clothes once fitted us," he added, shaking his attenuated neck inside his collar. "Never mind, we're here. That's about all that matters."

Leaving Wells to sample the various chairs and sofas of the hotel, with the solace of a pipe, while George went out to collect their boys and the mules on arrival, Bentley rode over to the British Legation on the horse that Mr. Hohler had kindly sent for him, with an orderly to show him the way. The orderly was an Indian, for the Legation guard is drawn from Indian regiments, and he was delighted when Bentley

returned his salute with a few words in his best kitchen Hindustanee.

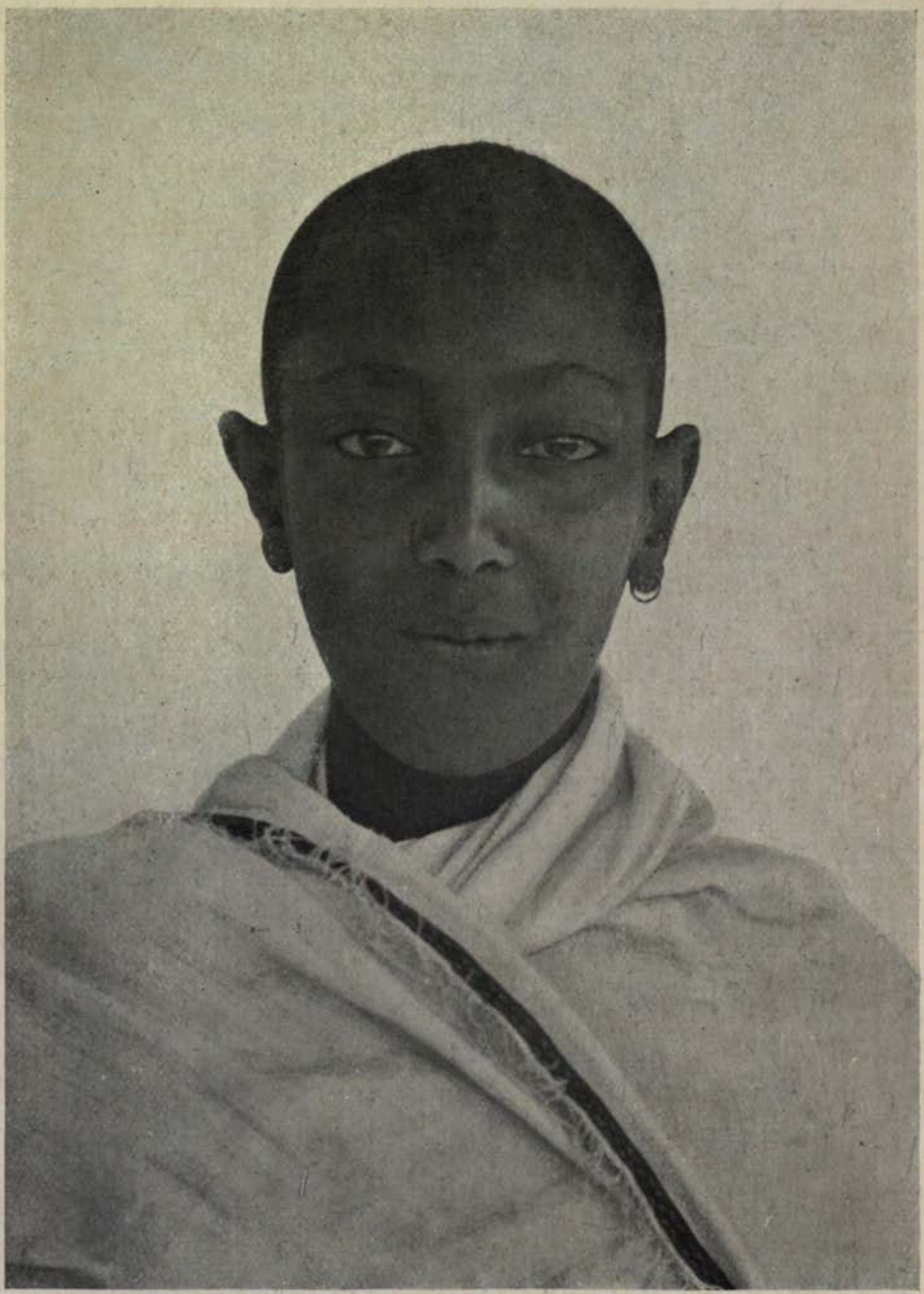
In the course of the banquet that followed, a message arrived from the Emperor to say that he wished the car to be sent round immediately for his inspection. Bentley assured Mr. Hohler that this was impossible, as he had given orders that it was to be thoroughly washed and cleaned up, and at that moment it was probably wet through, cushions and all, and that he himself really did not feel up to any more official receptions on that day.

Mr. Hohler therefore left the banquet and went himself to the Emperor to explain matters, and fixed the reception for eleven o'clock the next morning.

He then returned to the banquet in time to propose Bentley's health in the usual flowery speech.

Bentley rose to his feet amid acclamations loud and prolonged. He had prepared a few sentences between the courses, and, of course, forgot all about them as soon as he was on his feet, for while the applause was going on he tried to think of how he ought to address his audience. There were fortunately no Ras's before him, but many Excellencies, no doubt several foreign noblemen, and the usual gentlemen. He found himself wondering what the plural of Ras was; Ras's sounded so deucedly like asses, and it was lucky he had not to begin with "Your Excellent asses and gentlemen," as he felt sure it was bound to sound. He was still thinking when the applause

Reception room for European Ministers at the Palace, Addis-Ababa



Emperor Menelek's Heir

came to an end, and so, of course, he rapped out at once: "Ladies and Gentlemen," which naturally increased his self-confidence enormously. He managed to tie himself in a knot over the words "Excellencies, lords and gentlemen," which for a few moments he played with in quite a number of comical transpositions, and thereby established for himself the reputation of a humorist, when he had never been in more deadly earnest in his life.

He had intended to be dignified, self-depreciatory, explanatory, conciliatory, and any amount of other "ory's" ending up with a little bit of pathos. As it was, he found himself talking the wildest piffle in response to hearty guffaws of laughter. He found himself discoursing on the future Imperial Automobile Club of Adis Ababa, when the roads he had just begun to make with dynamite would be nicely tarred against dust and watered with motor water-carts, instead of the travellers being tarred and feathered as at present. He pictured the race for the Gordon Bennett Cup across the Bilen desert, with friendly Danakils mending punctures, instead of making them in the bodies of the drivers; and when he sat down again, had the happy satisfaction of knowing that he had not said one word of what he had meant to say, and as far as he remembered, he had not mentioned his journey at all.

Fortunately there was but one reporter, and no newspapers, and fully three parts of his audience understood no English, which did not prevent them

from laughing and applauding vigorously and thinking him a monstrous funny fellow.

When the storm of applause, that greeted his resuming his seat, had finally died away, Mr. Hohler consulted with him as to whom should be asked to occupy the fourth seat in the car as they drove up to the Palace.

Finally, it was decided, for some excellent reason, which has nothing to do with this story, that the seat should be offered to the representative of the Czar of All the Russians, and so it was arranged that Bentley should call for them at their respective Legations at a little before eleven the following morning.

The banquet then broke up, and after another hour's conversation with a few of the Europeans, Bentley returned to the hotel, full of the idea of sleeping once more on a bed.

CHAPTER XV

Reception by Menelek—Bentley's method of inducing the Emperor to take a drive—A lost Emperor—Wailing of bereaved nation—Enthusiasm when the King of Kings reappears—Menelek an early riser.

BEHOLD them, then, the following morning! A brightly-burnished car, with a spick and span Wells, in a new khaki suit, and a new pith helmet and new shining brown boots, and an old face; while next to him sat Bentley, equally renovated, all but the face, and wearing for the occasion all his medals on his semi-military khaki coat.

Bully, on this occasion, was left behind, as they found that it was not etiquette in Abyssinia for little dogs to call on Emperors without an invitation.

They picked up the two Ministers, gorgeous in full uniform, which rather took the shine out of their khaki, spotless as it was, and then, escorted as usual by a few thousand soldiers, they made their way slowly to the Palace.

It was, indeed, a triumphal procession as, at a foot pace, they passed through the crowded streets, and over innumerable bridges that spanned the streams they encountered on their way. Their escort flashed all the colours of the rainbow into the sunlight from the rich caparisons of their horses

and mules and their own silk robes of divers colours. Silver and gold flashed from the shields, and the soldiers' rifle barrels, innocent of any browning, glinted like spears in the background. The Abyssinian soldier on the march carries his rifle as suits him best; this takes away from the idea of discipline, but adds to the picturesqueness of the effect. Although to the European mind all manœuvres appear to be a jumble of confusion, there is no doubt that the men understand what they are about and get to the place wanted in some inexplicable manner, which would be impossible to an undisciplined rabble, such as they look like.

They had a good view of the town itself as they passed along in the hot sun. The native houses were all alike—mud and thatch, some bigger, some smaller. They passed several Coptic churches built of stone, and saw in the distance the larger houses of the European merchants, many of them disfigured by unsightly galvanized iron roofs. Menelek had evidently made good use of his steam-rollers, for the macadamized roads were excellent. The Abyssinians have, among many excellent qualities, one great failing, and that is that they interpret their traditional religion too literally. They are enjoined thereby, to wash once a year at the Epiphany; or, rather, to bathe in water once a year—as an outward manifestation of an inward grace. No doubt the inward grace is all right, but the outward manifestation is somewhat skimped, even on that solitary occasion,

Leaving the Palace with Emperor (on front seat) for the first drive
Mr Hohler and Russian Minister on back seat.

Polo teams comprised of Staffs of British and Italian Legations.

throughout the year. Then they jump into the water with their clothes on and out again as speedily as they may, and the annual ablution is complete.

Doubtless their sins do not require more than this, but it is possible that the hypercritical might consider that their bodies do, as evidenced by the effluvia disseminated from any large assemblage, and in Adis Ababa, all the assemblages are very large. By the time they reached the Palace, Bentley and Wells felt that they were choking, and their olfactory nerves were not much relieved on entering the courtyard of the Palace, where a few thousand more soldiers had been stewing for an hour or two in the sun.

Menelek, they were informed, was awaiting them in the Hall of Audience, and therefore, leaving the car at the door in charge of Wells and as many of the escort as could crowd into the still vacant spaces in the courtyards, the Ministers and Bentley were formally led into the presence of the King of Kings.

The Emperor was seated in state. In the agitation of the moment Bentley had only time to note that he had a shrewd and kindly black face; that he wore, evidently with the intention of going out presently, quite the most enormous clergyman's hat he had ever seen, black robes of rich silk set off with red, and brilliant purple silk socks on shoeless feet, while beside him, rather spoiling the picture, was a pair of enormous "jemimas," by which name Bentley had learnt in his youth to designate the spring-side boots dear to old ladies.

The presentation was made in due form, and after a few kindly words of praise for Bentley's achievement, through the medium of an interpreter, Menelek intimated that it was his pleasure to at once inspect the car.

Attendant slaves inserted his feet into the "jemimas," and he got up—a tall and commanding figure in his rich robes and enormous hat, in spite of the incongruous footgear.

They walked in procession to the porch of the Palace, and there Bentley gave a short lecture as to the working of a motor-car.

Menelek proved an attentive and intelligent listener, not allowing a single part to be left until he fully comprehended its functions.

At length, when everything had been explained, Menelek suddenly remarked to Mr. Hohler, "Yes, yes. He does not look like an anarchist who has come all this way to kill me; and the machine does not seem so very dangerous, as I have been told."

Bentley could only stare in astonishment when this was interpreted to him, and he began to have visions of himself minus arms and legs, which, from the number of cripples about, seemed to be a favourite form of punishment in the country; but he was reassured by the gleam of amusement in the Emperor's eyes.

"Yes," continued Menelek, "I have been told almost daily for the past month, that the moment I sat in the car I should be blown up. When I said

I thought that was foolish, for those in the car would be blown up with me, I was told that perhaps, instead of blowing me up, I should be driven over a precipice, and that those who drove the car had practised jumping off at the last moment." The old man placed his hand in a friendly fashion on Bentley's shoulder and told him that he did not think he looked as though he contemplated doing any of those dreadful things.

Bentley, through the medium of Mr. Hohler, responded with a flowery speech, and then, while the Emperor was again bending over the car, Mr. Hohler whispered hurriedly in his ear, "Bet you five pounds you don't get the old man to take a drive."

"Done," said Bentley promptly, and he asked Mr. Hohler to suggest that perhaps the Emperor would like to see the car in action.

Menelek nodded, and Bentley suggested that he should be accompanied by two members of the Court. Menelek nodded again, and intimated to two dignitaries that they might have the honour.

The two chosen ones did not absolutely rush for their seats. In fact, their ascent into the car might be described as careful and gingerly.

Bentley intimated that he proposed running down to the market-place and back, and asked the Emperor how long it generally took a man on a mule to do the double journey.

The market-place was about two miles off, and the road thereto was an excellent one and in sight

of the Palace all the way. Menelek produced a watch to match his hat—he evidently liked large things—and said that half an hour, there and back, was considered very good going. He also said that, as a token that he had really been there, Bentley could bring him a little basket of fruit from the shop at the end of the market.

Bentley suggested that, as he was anxious to go rather quickly, it would be as well if some of the crowds were removed. Then it was seen that Menelek was indeed Emperor. He said one or two short, sharp words and, in less time than it takes to write the fact, the road to the market-place began to clear, and as though by magic the teeming multitudes disappeared into side streets, leaving an absolutely clear road to their destination.

Wells turned the car in the courtyard, and as he did so, Bentley, who sat beside him, whispered in his ear, "Wells, I want to do two things: Get back as quickly as ever we can and incidentally frighten the souls of these two gentlemen behind out of their cases."

"Right, sir," said Wells, as usual.

They went. There is no mistake about it that they went to that market-place, for the car was nicely tuned up, the road was excellent, and Wells had been unable to relieve his feelings for some time.

There was also no mistake as to the feelings of the dignitaries inside the car. Their faces paled as much as the colour would allow, while they clutched

Emperor Menelek and Wells

ADDIS-ABABA.

Emperor, Menelek laughing at the simplicity of the drip feed lubricator. British and Russian Ministers in back of car.

nervously at the sides of the car and at each other absolutely speechless from fright.

As has been said, the car was nicely tuned up, and they were presently doing a comfortable fifty miles an hour, and by this time the dignitaries were limp lumps of wabbling flesh, allowing themselves to be bumped about helplessly, their eyes staring into vacancy and nearly starting out of their sockets.

When at length the car drew up at the market-place, after what really was less than a three-minutes' run, but which to them no doubt appeared a few centuries, with simultaneous promptitude each dignitary alighted from his own door, and when he reached terra firma ejaculated something which was no doubt the Amheric equivalent of "Thank God!"

But Bentley was not out to lose time. He bought his little basket and made a sign to Wells, and without more ado, each bundled a dignitary back into the car, slammed the door to, and before they had time to protest, much less get out again, Wells was in his seat, Bentley beside him, and they were off again, a little quicker perhaps than they had come, for the road was now, if anything, down-hill.

This time the dignitaries fairly howled, and held on to each other like two affrighted children. They were both big men, and gorgeously attired, and no doubt, in ordinary circumstances, brave enough, but all sense of self-respect fled from them on that return journey.

Going, they had held on to their feelings as much as they possibly could, which was not a very large amount; coming back, they were simply pitiable objects, their eyes streaming, their mouths gibbering, and their beautiful robes one mass of dust.

"Keep her going, Wells, as long as you dare," said Bentley, "I want the old man to get a good view of the pretty Punch and Judy show we've got in the back."

Wells obeyed, and had to use the brakes pretty sharply as he swung into the first courtyard, just past the Emperor, who had walked to the entrance to watch.

Bentley stepped out and handed his basket to the Emperor, who was delighted, and pointed to his watch to show that they had been gone under the six minutes. He then said with one of his roguish smiles, "I see that you have frightened my poor Ministers a good deal," for those two worthies were still sitting in the car, too paralysed to move.

Bentley signed to Wells to help them out, which he did, and while they were slowly crawling up to the Emperor, Bentley, speaking loud, said to Mr. Hohler, "Tell the Emperor I say that all the populace having seen the terror of his Ministers, what an opportunity for His Majesty to show that he has no fear."

No sooner had Mr. Hohler translated, than the old man jumped at the idea. He chaffed his Ministers unmercifully when they came up, and announced that he himself was going for a drive.

The British Legation, Addis-Ababa.

T. B. Hohler and Ras Waldo Gorgis in back of car. "The British Smile."

The Ministers almost prostrated themselves before him in their agonized endeavours to protect him from the ordeal they had just been through. To them it seemed impossible that such a thing could happen twice without deadly harm coming to everybody in the car.

The more they pleaded, the more Menelek laughed, and he walked straight up to the car and seated himself beside Wells.

Mr. Hohler and Bentley at once got into the back and Menelek signed to Wells to start slowly.

It is the custom that whenever Menelek moves, he is escorted by an army of soldiers, both cavalry and infantry, as a duty, while any few odd thousands who happen to be about join as volunteers. Therefore, as soon as Wells let in the clutch one or two regiments of cavalry and some battalions of infantry lined up as escort.

Even at the slow pace that Wells kept up at first, the infantry were soon left behind, although they struggled manfully to, at any rate, keep in sight of the car.

Presently, however, the Emperor turned to Mr. Hohler and said that he would like to go a little faster, so Wells was told to gradually put on speed.

The old man had much sounder nerves than his Ministers, for, as the speed increased, he began to laugh like a boy, and was soon urging Wells to go faster and faster.

Wells, nothing loath, responded with full-speed

ahead, and presently they were flying along on top speed, for Wells, watching the august presence beside him with one eye, to see how much he could stand, gradually let the car out to full throttle, and the old Emperor sat laughing and puffing for breath, with his goggleless eyes streaming, as happy as a schoolboy, while the now galloping escort was left somewhere on the horizon.

After a splendid run of about ten miles, Menelek bethought him of his people and laid his hand gently on Wells' arm as a signal to pull up, and with a comical grimace at Mr. Hohler, through the thick coating of dust that made his black face almost white, suggested that perhaps they had better return.

They went back at the same flying pace, and as they drew near the town they heard above the hum of the car a sort of long-drawn wail as of a nation howling in unison.

By and by they met the cavalry, still galloping madly on nearly-spent horses. They pulled up at the first sight of the car, and the men jumped from their horses and prostrated themselves in the dust at the sight of their Emperor, still alive and happy.

Still the awful wail from the town went on, like all the cats in creation having a night out at the same time. Menelek sat unmoved by it, much as a man might read a telegram in the papers announcing his death. His obituary notice was a bit premature, that was all. Presently the wail gradually changed to a shout of astonished delight, and then subsided

into vigorous feet shuffling, which, though perhaps equally annoying, was less ear-splitting.

The lost Emperor was restored to his sorrowing people, and perhaps he never before had received such a welcome on entering his capital as after that first momentous ride, when for almost an hour, he, who was never out of the sight of at least a few thousand of his subjects, had disappeared altogether over the horizon.

The old monarch, regardless of his appearance, of his dust-covered face and garments, and his streaming eyes, was still laughing and nodding back to Mr. Hohler and Bentley, and when the car finally drew up, stepped out with regret and said at once, "Capital! capital! At what time to-morrow?"

Bentley, in a rash moment, replied, "At any time your Majesty pleases."

"Very well, then, four o'clock."

Bentley bowed his head, never realizing, till he was told by Mr. Hohler, that the Emperor meant four o'clock in the morning. That was Menelek's favourite hour for any relaxation, just as the day began to dawn.

Thenceforward every morning Bentley and Wells had to curtail their night's rest and be at the Palace punctually at the hour of four a.m.

They did not enter the Palace again, but drove Mr. Hohler back to the British Legation, where they lunched, and Bentley was warmly congratulated on the success of the morning.

CHAPTER XVI

An Imperial visit—Bully and the Lion of Judah—Imperial honours and gifts—A ride—Impressions of the Abyssinians—Menelek as diplomatist—Intrigue—Question of Imperial chauffeur.

IT was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Bentley and Wells arrived back at the hotel. They noticed, as they drove up, that the usual swarm of soldiers, which they had come to look upon as their own particular bodyguard, seemed to be augmented by another slice of the Imperial army. This turned out to be the case, and George informed them that he had already sent a runner off to the Legation, for Menelek had sent these few hundred messengers to say that in his graciousness he would be pleased to call at the hotel himself in the course of the afternoon.

This was undoubtedly a great honour, and Bentley wondered whether it was he or the car that offered the principal attraction. It was a bit awkward to entertain Royalty fittingly, for, as has been said, the hotel, although fitted up with all sorts of modern conveniences, had as yet no one beyond George to put those conveniences into practice, and even George had his limitations when it came to facing an up-to-date kitchen range.

Menelek, or someone, had had the forethought of sending in a case of champagne and several jars of "tej," and these had been deposited in the principal drawing-room, and other parts of their belongings had been scattered about the various rooms.

Bentley was glad to find that their own boys had arrived and were squatting in the compound around the mules. He called them up, and in the next ten minutes much shifting of stuff was accomplished; and by the time that another small army heralded the approach of the Lion of Judah, everything was out of sight, with the exception of a couple of bottles of champagne and one jar of tej, with a few glasses.

Bentley thought hurriedly as to whether there was anything among his personal belongings that might be deemed of sufficient novelty to please the august personage who was on his way, and fixed on an electric torch as being as likely as anything to serve his purpose. Wells had in his conjuring-box an almost exactly similar black tube case, with an identical button to press; but instead of a light appearing, a hideous jack-in-the-box sprang out with a squeak. Bentley was careful to ascertain that he had got hold of the right one, for he was not certain how the King of Kings, good sportsman though he undoubtedly was, might appreciate a practical joke.

Presently, seeing the royal cortège approaching, they hurried to the door, with their twelve Abys-

sinians lined up in true military fashion on either side of the steps of the verandah.

Menelek was riding a big, sumptuously caparisoned mule, still in his clergyman's hat, black robes and jemimas, while attendants carried an enormous umbrella over his head.

He dismounted at the foot of the steps and walked without any ceremony straight up into the drawing-room, which he evidently knew well. He then sat down to have a confidential chat about motor-cars, traction-engines, railways, guns, engines, phonographs, and other novelties which he had introduced into his country of late years. He had brought his interpreter with him, but he soon showed that he preferred listening to Bentley's halting Amheric to waiting till his correct English was translated. They were very soon quite good friends, and Bentley produced his electric torch, and as the Emperor had never seen such a thing before, he was greatly delighted with it; and Bentley, risking whether it was correct or not to do so, offered it to him, and Menelek made no bones about accepting it.

At this moment Bully, who was supposed to be shut up in one of the rooms, came wandering in at the window, having probably got out of the window of his prison. He evidently seemed to understand that the particular black man seated on the best chair was not the sort of black man to be kicked at sight, and so he followed Bentley's lead, and was scrupulously polite. Menelek, after inquiring "Who

had kicked his nose in?" returned his civilities; and Bully, although he contrived to show by his manner that he considered an English bulldog quite the equal of any foreign potentate, condescended to evince a friendly interest in the Emperor's jemimas, and lay at the Emperor's feet, who played with his ears while talking, and ever and anon surreptitiously tasted the Abyssinian substitute for blacking, of which at home he used to be very fond on occasion.

Seeing that matters were progressing so satisfactorily, and to prevent his august guest from getting bored, as his entourage undoubtedly were, Bentley led the conversation to their sojourn in the desert; and Menelek, as he had expected, was much interested in the account of the conjuring tricks which had mystified the savages. He asked to see some, and Bentley told Wells to fetch his box of tricks. Wells was a little shy at first, but when Bentley had explained, through the medium of the interpreter this time, the nature of the tricks Wells could do, Menelek waited impatiently till he returned.

We have all been accustomed from our earliest childhood to see conjurers produce eggs out of any part of another person's anatomy at will, and we know that they are not so produced, but merely that the "quickness of the hand deceives the eye"; but a little thought will enable one to realize that, seen for the first time, without any explanation, it is a very marvellous performance; and so Menelek and his court evidently thought it. Catching coins and

making them disappear is also something touching on the miraculous, and the Abyssinians were evidently beginning to look upon Wells as something uncanny. Wells tried a very successful variation for the first time, while exhibiting his powers of palming. He borrowed the Emperor's electric torch, and after deftly changing it for his own jack-in-the-box, handed it apparently to one of the members of the suite. The latter pressed the button, as he had seen the Emperor do, and with a howl of terror fled from the room in dismay, after dropping the box on to the floor as though it was a snake. Menelek laughed till his eyes streamed with tears at this, and evidently thought a good deal more of the jack-in-the-box than of his torch; so this was formally presented to him also, and the two cases were given to one of the suite to carry, who received them somewhat suspiciously.

Eventually Menelek produced his watch and showed it to Bentley with a laugh. He had been in the hotel for nearly two hours. Before leaving, he bestowed on Bentley the principal Abyssinian military decoration, which he placed on his head. This is a sort of head-dress made of a lion's mane, and represents in Abyssinia much what the V.C. does at home.

Bentley bowed and murmured his acknowledgments for the honour, and then escorted his Imperial guest to the door, where he found that the marks of the Emperor's favour were not bounded by the decoration, for on the verandah were two men

The Minister of Finance's room at the Palace

ADDIS-ABABA.

Entrance to the Queen's apartments at the Palace.

struggling with a chain, to which was attached a half-grown lioness, another gift from the Emperor.

The huge beast was evidently quite tame and playful, and Bentley motioned to the men to take it round to the compound at the back, hoping that it would not enter into the Emperor's head to send him round an elephant or two as they got more friendly.

Menelek shook hands and mounted his mule. He rode off amid his thronging escort, after telling Bentley to come to the palace whenever he felt inclined. He also told him that the Empress Taitu had expressed a wish to see him, and impressed upon him that this was a particular honour, as the Empress had only once received a white man before privately.

Cast upon their own resources once more, Bentley and Wells first of all fumigated the apartments, in which the Imperial court had left a reminder of their visit. They then went out with Bully to inspect the lioness, which was now being tied up in one corner of the compound, while the mules, without being urged thereto, were crowded in the far corner.

Bully was not quite sure at first whether lion-baiting was expected of him; but seeing that the great beast allowed itself to be fondled, he made friendly advances, and these were reciprocated. In a few days he had established a firm friendship with his new friend, and he used to worry her neck while she lay on her back and played like a kitten.

Among their kit, that had been sent on by caravan,

were two Mexican saddles, the finest type of saddle in the world, and as everybody who is anybody rides in Abyssinia, either a mule or a horse, Bentley, after inspecting Beelzebub and his confrères, shook his head, and sent George off to round up some horse-flesh for inspection.

Horses are not dear in Adis Ababa, those shown in the photograph of the polo teams averaged in price about thirty shillings each; so Bentley thought that he might run to the extravagance of mounting himself and Wells in style.

There was no lack of choice, for George returned, followed seemingly by the whole of the population who were not soldiers, and each had two or three horses to sell. Bentley walked along the crowd and finally selected two ponies and left George to pay for them. They then found that it was easier to find horse-vendors than to get rid of them when found. They eventually had to seek the assistance of their bodyguard, who effectually cleared the space in front of the hotel, and they were able to start for their first ride.

The result of that ride was that they recorded their impressions of the Abyssinian at home. These were: that the Abyssinian man walks about with a gun mostly, and gets into everybody's way while doing so. The Abyssinian woman does all the work, and gets into everybody's way while doing it, and has a few hours' friendly conversation every time that she has succeeded in effecting a bump; so, as a rule, the day

passes very pleasantly, and time is not much of an object.

Such time as remains to waste is employed in drinking tej, and an hour or two of this occupation produces satisfactory results, which necessitate two or three hours' retirement in the nearest ditch.

A good portion of the population is either in the state of preparation for this species of retirement or in the retirement itself, and there is no duty on tej, which the Abyssinian child learns how to brew for himself as the principal item of his education.

That an Abyssinian sometimes, in error, may speak the truth, but that this is doubtful, and it is believed that no official record exists of such a case. That the judicial mind evidently thinks that a citizen minus an arm or a leg is just as useful to the community as when he is whole, for even what might be considered as minor offences are visited, or, at any rate, used to be, by dismemberment either of a hand or limb.

During their stay they learned that Menelek never trifles with his subjects. He himself is enlightened and shrewd, and fully aware of the failings of the native mind, high and low. The administration of justice is difficult, because not only are the judges themselves not always above suspicion, but the art of lying, by daily practice, has become an expert science, and consequently suborners and bearers of false witness abound, while blackmailing is raised to the level of a high art.

The Abyssinian still eats his meat raw, and even Menelek has a preference in that way, although he has a European cook for visitors. Water around the capital is plentiful, but what it is used for is not yet discovered. The inhabitants certainly neither use it for washing nor drinking purposes.

They returned from their ride, feeling that they knew Adis Ababa fairly well, and they had paid a duty call on several of the legations, leaving the rest for the next afternoon.

During their talks with the various representatives of the great Powers, although, naturally, diplomatic subjects were not freely discussed, it was sufficiently evident that the importation of anything new was by no means a trivial matter; perhaps not so much on account of the article itself, but because its arrival was sure to add further difficulty in the way of the smooth running of diplomatic wheels.

Menelek, it seemed, was very much like a naughty schoolboy in class, whenever some wretched diplomat had at length pinned him down to an interview. He was a great believer in the proverb: "If you want a thing done well, do it yourself," and consequently himself attended to the most trivial matters of his large household, and in order to prevent pilfering of the various European commodities that had been delivered to him at prices practically equivalent to their weight in gold, was in the habit of keeping all sorts of keys himself.

It is annoying enough in an English house when

ADDIS-ABABA.

South-western wing of Palace.

Emperor Menelek's quarters at Palace, Addis-Ababa.

conversation is continually being interrupted by a knock at the door, and the housemaid enters and says: "Please, 'um, cook wants some pepper," or onions, or whatever it may be. It is no doubt tenfold more disconcerting when trying to convince an astute and wily potentate that what he has considered black all along, by the evidence of his eyes and common-sense, is really snow white when viewed through the particular spectacles supplied by the diplomat's own paternal government, to be interrupted by a similar knock and the appearance of a black face in place of that of the housemaid, to be told that some Abyssinian "John Smith" has broken his trowel and can't lay any more stones on the new church until a fresh one is supplied. Menelek would thereupon instantly forget all about the diplomatic tergiversations and rush to the enormous telescope that looked out of his window, and first of all verify by its means if "John Smith" had really dropped work and was standing idle, or was merely drunk and incapable. He then would either go himself and hand out a new trowel, or, if he thought that there was not sufficient temptation in that particular store, would entrust the key to one of his suite who had no predilection for trowels or nails or pickaxes. He would then probably wait with his eye at the telescope, having a general look round at the roads, et cetera, until he saw the trowel duly handed to "John Smith" and the latter begin work again.

He would then blandly ask the unfortunate diplomat

to kindly repeat the few remarks he had made from the beginning, as he had failed to exactly comprehend his meaning; putting in at the same time one or two terse sentences that showed his unfortunate interlocutor that Menelek understood probably a good deal more about the matter than he did himself. Still, duty is duty, and instructions have to be obeyed, and so the weary conversation would be resumed, till a mounted man rushed up to the Palace with news that a traction-engine had gone wrong, or that a murderer had been caught, or one of his mules was sick.

Menelek would then rush away and attend to the matter, forgetting once more all about politics; returning when he had put things right again, with the same bland request that the few remarks might be repeated "from the beginning." It is perfectly understandable that negotiations for the introduction of serious changes that did not appeal to Menelek could in this manner be indefinitely drawn out, for hunger at length would drive the unfortunate diplomatist to end the interview rather than "begin from the beginning" for the fiftieth time. Menelek was always courteous, always charming, always regretful at the constant interruptions, always anxious for a renewal of the most interesting conversations, and never by any means caught napping for one moment.

Various versions of the Emperor's idiosyncrasies were given by the different diplomatists that Bentley met, but they all worked around and through the

one same theme—that Menelek was a bit too much for them. The old man would talk for hours on any new fad, and curiously enough on those occasions, woe betide the unfortunate interrupter; and, therefore, the representatives of Powers, who were desirous of finding any means by which they could interest the Emperor sufficiently to get him to spend hours in their company without interruption, were none too pleased at the arrival of the car, which they foresaw would occupy his whole time for the next few weeks, and that their own nations would not benefit thereby in the least. Hints were delicately conveyed to Bentley that a word from him in season as to the advisability of pushing on the railway would probably not come amiss. There had been no great anxiety that the car should arrive, especially as a private venture, but it was there now, and Menelek was evidently delighted with it; so for the time Bentley became quite an important person, as he who has the ear of an Emperor ever is.

Bentley was in no way "out for trouble," and it did not take long to discover that the atmosphere of Adis Ababa was one of intrigue, and nothing but intrigue, on all sides, and he registered a vow to attend religiously to his motoring, offering up a silent thanksgiving that he had been allowed to arrive at all, and wondering to himself whether he would have had the nerve to start if he had known how much fuss there was about it.

That evening they spent in studying a map of

Adis Ababa and its environs which Mr. Hohler had lent them, and consulted together about the possibility of supplying Menelek with an efficient chauffeur. There was no doubt that Wells would get the post of royal chauffeur if he applied for the job; but Wells, having bid an eternal farewell to Mrs. Wells in spirit and by letter several times, was anxious to say "Good-day" to her once more in the flesh, now that he found himself still alive. Besides, Wells did not love the black man, and had not the slightest hope that Mrs. Wells would even consider the matter of joining him in Abyssinia; so it was decided that Menelek must look elsewhere for a chauffeur. Bentley determined to consult Mr. Hohler on the point as well as Menelek himself, for in view of the evident diplomatic importance that was attached to the car, it would be as well, if possible, to keep the surroundings as British as was feasible.

Bentley thought of adding yet one more post to George Pooh-Bah, but George was a Somali, and the Somalis have the same affection for Abyssinians as his Satanic Majesty is supposed to have for holy water; and, besides, George had not the slightest intention of leaving Bentley again until the latter finally quitted the country in one of those large ships that sailed into the Nowhere, where George was disinclined to follow.

In view of the early hour at which they were due at the Palace they retired early, and were not sparing in the matter of fuel for hot baths.

CHAPTER XVII

A question of motoring costume—A drive to Ras Waldo Gorgis' palace—The Excellent Skinner—Menelek impressed by American Mission—The Emperor determines to be his own chauffeur—Thorough inspection of car—Edalji—The real Menelek, an impression—The Empress Taitu—An especial honour.

THE Emperor was already waiting when they drove up to the Palace the following morning. Seeing that he was attired as before, in his beautiful black silk robes, clergyman's hat and "jemimas," Bentley, who, since their long conversation of the day before, felt on excellent terms with the dear old man, asked him if he did not think it a pity to spoil another set of beautiful robes, as he had spoiled those of the day before, with the dust. Menelek laughed, and said that he only wore one kind of costume, and that, if he spoiled his clothes, the court tailors would be all the more pleased, as they had been when he first started messing about with machinery and oily traction-engines.

As for his hat, it was a very good hat, and he would give Bentley one like it. He sent an attendant away, who returned with a facsimile of the hat the Emperor was wearing. He motioned to Bentley to

put it on, which he did, and his head disappeared as though into a hip-bath. Menelek was immensely pleased at this, but said he thought that they had each better stick to the clothes to which they were accustomed. However, he accepted with pleasure a pair of goggles which Bentley had brought, for he confessed that the wind and dust of the day before had tried his eyes. With his big hat and enormous goggles he looked absurdly Episcopalian. As before, he insisted on sitting in the front seat beside Wells, and as Wells had no Amheric at all beyond a few swear words, Bentley decided to drive himself, and Wells took his seat in the back alongside of a fat Ras with an unpronounceable name, who did not at all seem to share the Emperor's enthusiasm.

Menelek had already made up his mind where he wanted to go. He knew exactly the distance they had been the day before and the time that it had taken them to do it, and he had mapped out in his shrewd old head an itinerary that he calculated would take them about two hours. Menelek had no foolish ideas about speed limits, and he had already, hours before, sent horsemen out to say that no one was to dare to show his nose on any of the roads he proposed to traverse. This he made clear to Bentley, who wished that he could take someone with the influence of Menelek about with him whenever he went motoring.

That morning Menelek had something to attend to, or found something to attend to, at the Palace of Ras

Waldo Gorgis, the domain of the uncle of Menelek's who had met them on arrival, and who rules a distant province, but keeps this palace as a sort of town house. It is a large oval-shaped building surrounded by a mud wall, in which there are many courts laid out with trees. Menelek got out and showed them over the Palace, and explained that it was there that the American Mission under the Excellent Skinner had lodged. Bentley said that he had had the pleasure of meeting the Excellent Skinner, and Menelek waxed warm in his eulogies of that gentleman. Possibly there is a certain directness about American diplomacy that appealed to Menelek. It seems that the Excellent Skinner had arrived with what he wanted already neatly written down in the choicest Amheric by a learned University professor, and as he did not happen to want much, merely that American trade should not be unduly interfered with by the intrigues of surrounding Powers, he appears to have got what he wanted without much trouble, and to have left upon Menelek the impression of a man who knew what he wanted, representing a country which also knew what it wanted and had every intention of getting it. Menelek managed to convey the impression that, charming as he had found the Excellent Skinner, he was none the less pleased that a very large expanse of sea separated Abyssinia from the country where there are countless millions of Excellent Skinners; for Menelek has evidently enough and as much of the

bland diplomatists of the old school as he knows what to do with, without indulging in any games of hustle.

The Excellent Skinner's shiny silk hat had also impressed itself very forcibly on Menelek's brain, as also his plain black clothes.

Menelek himself had a preference for black, and most foreign representatives appear before him a blaze of colour, with many gorgeous decorations. The charm and novelty of the austere Americans had evidently made its effect, and Bentley began to regret that he and Wells had forgotten their dress suits, for the sight of the car with them in top hats and tail coats, and Menelek and his Ministers in robes, would have been worth photographing indeed.

From the Palace they drove to the Guebi, an enormous barn-like building where Menelek entertains his guests. He then and there invited Bentley to his next luncheon party, which would take place in less than a week, and to which he expected about eight thousand guests.

Menelek was an excellent cicerone, and pointed out anything of interest on the road. He also drew Bentley's attention to the fact that, although they were seemingly alone, the road was guarded all along. He said, with a chuckle, that he had had quite a bad time of it with his Ministers for the fright he had given the whole population the day before, and that finally they had come to a compromise, that as he intended to fly about the country in this new

devil's carriage, and as it was manifestly impossible that any escort could go with him, he should always tell them the day before in which direction he intended to go, so that they could divide his usual escort over the roads.

On the way home they paid an informal call both at the Russian and British Legations. Fortunately in Abyssinia people rise early, and so both Ministers, if not in full court costume, were presentable, although it was barely six o'clock.

Bentley mentioned the subject of a chauffeur to Mr. Hohler, and Menelek promptly said that it was his intention to learn to drive the car himself. He had watched Wells the day before and Bentley that morning, and he saw that there was nothing above his power and no exertion that an old man might not attempt. He invited Mr. Hohler to attend at the first lesson, and so for the moment the question of a chauffeur was left in abeyance.

When they reached the Palace Menelek spent a good deal of time inspecting the car again, and now he touched the throttle himself and was greatly pleased when he found that the engine raced immediately in response to his touch. He would have liked to have kept it racing indefinitely; he said he could not make his traction-engines do that; but he soon appreciated Bentley's explanation that it did not do the parts any good to keep them whirring away at a few thousand revolutions per minute.

He then turned his attention to the switch, and was equally delighted with this, because he found that he could switch off and the engine would almost stop, but that, by switching on again, the "chug! chug! chug!" immediately began again. Quite a long time went in this amusement, till finally he left it too long, and the expected "chug! chug!" did not begin. He thought the car was broken at first, but Bentley explained how it was, and took him round to the handle and showed him how to start the car. The old man shook his head at this, for manual labour of any sort was not to be thought of, and he said that he thought he would have to have some of his men trained to at any rate start the car. He was very anxious about the oiling, for it had evidently been impressed upon him that all machinery must be copiously oiled.

The system of lubrication had to be thoroughly explained, and Bentley had difficulty in preventing him from filling the whole engine up by means of the auxiliary pump. Finally, with the engine stopped, he managed to squeeze his robes into the driving seat and learned how to change the speeds and manipulate the clutch and brake pedals.

Then, satisfied that he had learned a good deal, he took Bentley with him into the Palace and sent a messenger off for an Indian attendant, in whose technical skill he appeared to have great confidence. This man proved to be a Parsee, and he was handed over to Bentley and Wells for tuition in motor-

driving and such mechanics as they could drive into his head. They had subsequently a very pleasant time with Edalji, who, although not lacking in intelligence, had a faculty of forgetting anything that was told him in a shorter time than seemed possible. Wells at last said that the only thing he did not forget was the sun, to which he bobbed religiously at sunset, getting out of the car for the purpose and making them wait till he had finished his orisons.

Menelek told Bentley to look in again in the course of the morning and showed him the famous telescope room, where he would find him.

They were then, at about nine o'clock, able to escape back to the hotel for breakfast, feeling absolutely famished.

It was evident that they would not be able to get away from the country until Menelek and his Parsee had both learned how to drive, so they prepared to settle down in the hotel for an indefinite period.

As promised, Bentley rode over to the Palace at about mid-day, and was at once shown into the Emperor, regardless of the fact that he was closeted with a foreign Minister, who did not seem best pleased at his entry. Bentley seemed to notice a twinkle in the Emperor's eye, as much as to say that this interruption was not unlooked-for or unwelcome to him. He immediately gave the Minister a voluble description of their morning ride and of his intention to learn how to drive the car. He insisted on his looking through the telescope at

the vast expanse of country that they had covered in less than two hours, and finally, with every manifestation of sincere regret, said he was so sorry that M. —— must really go, but there was still plenty of time to discuss the little matter before them on another occasion.

When the diplomatist had gone Menelek sat down with a sigh of relief, and began talking, in his quiet and friendly manner, about men and things in general. Menelek, no doubt, was hazy on scientific subjects, and had been taught, as all other Abyssinians are still taught, that the sun goes round the earth. Whether he believed it still or not, or whether he troubled himself much about the matter one way or another did not transpire, but it was soon evident that Menelek, a man of action himself, was pleased to meet another man of action who had done without talking. With the half-confidences of the skilled diplomatist he drew Bentley out as to the views he had gathered of men and things during his travels over the world, and he let it be seen, as in a glass darkly, that he was well aware of a great deal more than many of his interlocutors gave him credit for. He was quite enlightened, for instance, as to the advantages of a railway up to his capital, and the consequent increase of trade and of the wealth of the country that would follow; but he was equally well aware that foreign capital meant foreign interests, and sooner or later, foreign soldiers following those interests. He questioned

Bentley closely as to the impressions he had gained of the Japanese people, and let it be seen that he had closely followed the marvellous rise of that great nation into world power. He also spoke of the Chinese and the Indians, and the other African races.

The impression that Bentley carried away from that interview and many subsequent ones was that he had been privileged to talk with a great and soured mind, that had been baffled in its early ambitions by the ineptitude of his people to follow in the line he wished to lead. Menelek was evidently as well aware as Bentley himself that he had been able to conquer the surrounding savage tribes merely because he had been able and had had the forethought to arm his men with European weapons; that he had got the best of the Italians, not because his army or his soldiers were in any way a match for the drilled European troops, but because the Italians had made the mistake of imagining that victory would be too easy, and then had not been able or felt inclined to face the expense of a prolonged campaign for the sake of a conquest of which it was doubtful whether they would be allowed to reap adequate benefits. Without saying so in words, Menelek allowed it to be seen that he considered himself much in the position of a kitten playing with a tempting bone, round whom sat a circle of fierce dogs snarling at each other. The kitten was doing no harm to the bone, which it could only

pretend to eat with its tiny teeth, and the dogs were waiting, each one, till some chance stroke might send the bone near enough for a grab without securing a bite for the next dog at the same time.

Menelek had evidently had dreams at one time of being able to change the kitten into a dog that could hold its own, but those dreams had gone, thanks to the miserable material to his hand; and in his old age he was driven into a sort of counterpart of the Sick Man of Europe, using his immense intelligence in baffling intrigue after intrigue by procrastination, instead of being able to devote his time to the project of Europeanizing his country, and creating a new world power in North-East Africa. If in many ways he appeared almost child-like in his simplicity and interest in new things, it was because he was too honest to pretend to a knowledge that he did not possess, and too anxious to learn to hide his child-like inquisitiveness into the working of each new serious toy. It is perhaps well for some of the rest of the world that Menelek did not find a nation ready to his hand that could comprehend and back up his ambitions. As it was, he remained a courteous and kindly gentleman, strong in himself, weak in his people, who worshipped his strength from afar without being able to assimilate any portion of it, and withal with that saving sense of humour that made him tolerant of the miserable ineptitude of his subjects.

Bentley left him that morning, wondering and

admiring, and feeling that, such as he was, Menelek had made the best possible out of the situation in which he found himself, after forcing his way thereto with very different ideas.

Knowing the Emperor, he was anxious to make the acquaintance of his partner in life, who, by rumour, was also the sharer of his secrets. Two names had constantly been on the Emperor's lips, those of Messrs. Chefneux and Ilg, who for years had been his advisers and tutors in European ways and means; both of these gentlemen had left Abyssinia prior to Bentley's arrival, and Menelek felt their loss severely.

Whose Abyssinia will be eventually, is written in the book of the gods. Possibly Menelek, in his wisdom, has settled upon the man to fit the hour, when he dies, if he is not already dead, but that hour is likely to be a strenuous one, and will require a strong man to fit it; but Abyssinia is fertile in surprises, and the late Ras Makonnen was of the stuff of which conquerors and administrators are made, and possibly there are others like him at present in the background.

At six o'clock punctually Bentley drove up again to the Palace and left the car in one of the compounds, where it was in full view of the Empress's apartments.

He was immediately ushered into the presence, and found the Empress Taitu, surrounded by a throng of attendants, seated on a large throne-like

chair. The Empress was perhaps the biggest woman he had ever seen, perhaps not in height, but certainly in girth, and all thoughts of inducing her to take a drive in the car instantly fled, for it was doubtful if she could have accommodated herself in the back of the car, even if both seats were placed at her disposal. Taitu had been married several times before espousing Menelek, and there were, no doubt, excellent political reasons for the match, in addition to personal charm. She was evidently a lady with a will and a mind of her own, and Bentley felt that her manner of speaking must have been similar to the abruptness of our own Queen Elizabeth, and that she probably was interlarding her words with the Amheric equivalent for "Odds fish" and "Odds bodikins!"

She received him graciously enough, and then without further preamble said, "(Odds fish), I hear that you have done something without talking about it. Most white men come here and talk about doing things for a year or two, and then end without doing anything, so (odds bodikins!) I thought I would see you."

That was all, and as the conversation, after Bentley had bowed his acknowledgments, seemed flagging, he wondered if he ought to retire now that "odds bodikins! he had been seen," when he noticed that Taitu was on the point of rising from her seat. This was an operation that evidently required a good deal of consideration and altruistic assistance, and fully explained the pause in proceedings.

Once the Empress was fairly on her feet, she said that she had heard that the car had been placed where she could see it, and she walked to the window, and Bentley had to explain again. He signalled to Wells to start the car and drive it round the courtyard, and Wells gave a little circus exhibition of trick driving. Taitu condescended to be pleased, and said so. She evidently thought that Bentley had made the car, for she told him that he was a clever fellow, and that, as he was there, he could do a little job for her.

It seemed that she had a complete biograph apparatus, which probably her suite had been taught how to use but had promptly forgotten, or something had gone wrong, and it could not be used.

Bentley was shown this, and fortunately he had made a study of the instrument when at home, for he had had the idea of taking an operator and machine with him, but had abandoned the idea finally through lack of space in the car. He therefore was soon able to detect what was wrong, and he sent for Wells, telling him in a note to bring such tools as he required. In half an hour they had the machine clicking away again satisfactorily, and handed it over to the Armenian operator, who was exceedingly grateful, for he had been like to lose his job. Bentley then returned to the Empress, who once more went through the lengthy performance of rising, and they had an exhibition of one or two films. Then Taitu announced that she had had

enough, and the procession adjourned once more, painfully slowly, to the first room, where Taitu took two massive gold bracelets of pure, soft Abyssinian gold and pressed them into Bentley's hand with a smile. He took this as a final dismissal, and bowed low in thanks and made his way out backwards as well as he could by cannoning against the suite one after the other till he reached the door.

It was nearly eight o'clock when they reached the hotel once more, and as he had been at it since four o'clock in the morning, Bentley felt that he had had enough of Royalty for one day, especially as Menelek had decided to drive the next morning to the Summer Palace on the hills some twenty-five miles away.

Bully was a little hurt that evening, as he had been left alone very nearly the whole livelong day; but they gathered from George that he had contrived to amuse himself fairly well with an occasional tussle with the lioness, and by chivying any inquisitive boys out of the rooms of the hotel, which Bully had decided was no place for them. On the whole, except for occasional forced retirement, Bully approved of the capital, for he fed on the fat of the land, had plenty of servants, there was always shade, and plenty of choice of comfortable chairs to lie in.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Summer Palace—Advantage of motor over mule—A polo match—Another tragedy—Abyssinian justice—Menelek as architect—A Coptic service—A luncheon party with 8,000 guests—The Guebi—Bentley falls ill—Near death once more—Bully sickens also—Bentley recovers—Preparations for return.

THE drive to the Summer Palace the next morning proved to be as nearly as possible ideal motoring The day was just dawning, and the first morning pink was tinging the distant hills, while long shadows interlaced the plains and the roads from the trees as they swung past.

The roads, as before, were seemingly deserted, though no doubt there were soldiers on the watch everywhere. They soon left the town, and now they could see innumerable herds of cattle on either side of them still huddled together, for the morning air was bleak and Bentley and Wells were glad of their coats. Menelek, as it was to be a long drive, had allowed himself to be persuaded to sit in the body of the car, and, after a little, appreciated the change, when he found that he could loll back comfortably, and that the wind was not so cutting.

It transpired that the stout Ras of the day before had been violently sick on his return home from the

ride. Menelek was not clear as to whether the sickness was simulated in order to escape similar further ordeals, or whether the continued emotion had really been too much for his feelings. At any rate, Menelek had sent round to Mr. Hohler, inviting him to share the ride, and saying that they would pick him up on the way.

Getting to the Summer Palace hitherto had always been in the nature of an expedition, in the midst of which Menelek had sat on his mule for a full day in the hot sun before they finally arrived.

It may be judged, therefore, that when they swung into the courtyard a little under three-quarters of an hour after starting, Menelek was more than satisfied with the new mode of progression, and produced his big watch and made them all look at it, to make sure of the astounding fact that they had really come so quickly.

It was known that they were coming, but the guards of the Palace had not the slightest idea that they were coming so quickly, and, consequently, there was much hurrying and skurrying as they appeared in sight, and they were finally received with breathless agitation.

Menelek, far from being annoyed at the lack of preparation, was all the more pleased at this fresh evidence of the marvellous powers of his new acquisition, and no sooner was he at the Palace than he seemed desirous of being off again. He showed them hurriedly over the place, and took up a well-

known ornament from one of the tables and put it in his pocket, remarking with a smile, that he doubted whether even his Imperial word would be believed unless he produced some tangible evidence that he had really been all the way to the Palace and back in the time.

Menelek, like all young motorists, was rapidly succumbing to the speed fever, which did not prevent his keeping a sharp look-out around him, and pointing out game in the distance that the others would have passed unnoticed. He even regretted that he had not brought a rifle with them, so that they might have tried some long shots.

When they arrived back at the Palace, scarcely two hours after they had left, they were evidently no more expected there than they had been at the Summer Palace, and the exclamations of astonished incredulity among the suite were evidently delightful to Menelek.

That afternoon there was a polo match, and Menelek found the back seat of the car so much preferable to his mule, that he decided to drive there. There was some conversation about this among the Court dignitaries, as it seemed that there was a difficulty about the royal umbrella, which, it appeared, was an inseparable part of any State or semi-State function. Menelek has a will of his own, and intended to drive, umbrella or no umbrella, when Bentley asked to see it, and found that it would be quite possible to fix it at the back of the

car; but then it appeared that it would be necessary for the Emperor to sit in solitary state in the car, for the shade of the Imperial umbrella was sacred. Menelek finally gave in to this with rather bad grace, for he was a garrulous old man and liked someone to talk to.

They proceeded at a slow pace to the polo-ground in the afternoon, and the Emperor applauded, but was distinctly bored, although, as usual, he insisted upon having all the points of the game explained to him. He found that pressing business would not allow of his staying till the end of the match, and they drove home in the same state in which they had come, through the thronged streets and followed by the huge escort.

That evening at the hotel they had another unpleasant experience, which showed the ungovernable temper of the Abyssinian when more or less under the influence of tej.

Bentley had had cause to punish one of their boys for too much indulgence in that line, and, at the same time, had had reason to reward one other boy for general good conduct. The reward and punishment were neither of a very serious nature, merely the giving to the rewarded one a yard or two more of American cotton and the punished one so much less.

They were sitting at their evening meal, when they heard a shot at close quarters. Wells at once jumped up, but Bentley, thinking that it was probably only a

soldier who had let his gun off by mistake, sat on eating. Presently Wells rushed back with a scared face, and said that he had found the rewarded boy lying in a pool of blood on the steps of the verandah. Bentley at once went out and saw the punished boy racing away from the hotel with a revolver in his hand. The soldiers about, in answer to Bentley's shout, promptly seized the man, who threw away the revolver, which was picked up and brought with him back to the hotel. Bentley stooped over the wounded man, and did his best to stay the flow of blood; but he was already unconscious, for the bullet had evidently passed through the lung just over the heart, and he was rapidly choking and died in two or three minutes. Bentley immediately rode over to the Palace, leaving the murderer guarded, and was at once given audience of the Emperor. The latter did not seem in the least astonished at the occurrence, and said that by Abyssinian law a tooth was to be given for a tooth and an ear for an ear. That, if the man had any relatives, the murderer might be handed over to them; but that as Bentley was evidently *in loco parentis*, the simplest way would be for him to shoot the prisoner, when he got back to the hotel; or, if he objected to turning executioner himself, Menelek would oblige by having the man hanged in public in the morning.

Bentley left it at that; the boy was taken off by the soldiers and duly hanged in the market-place the following morning.

Abyssinian justice therefore, on occasion, can be very rough and ready and sufficiently prompt.

By this the number of their boys had now diminished from the original twenty to seventeen. Bentley harangued the remainder, and promised that for the future drunkenness and dismissal would be synonymous terms, in so far that the drunken man would also be a dismissed man.

It seemed that the murderer had gone into Wells' room and taken his revolver to do the deed. Bully had unfortunately been suffering from the severe attack of greediness that invariably seized him at meal-times, and, therefore, had been unable to attend to his job of keeping the house clear of natives; otherwise the tragedy might have been averted. This was duly pointed out to him by both Bentley and Wells; but Bully gave them each his paw, in turn, as a hint not to refer to unpleasant subjects.

The next morning, Menelek, whose fad at the moment was building churches, had decided to go round and visit a few of them, to see how they were getting on. Bentley, therefore, took with him a picture of the cathedral at Westminster, and Menelek was interested to know that his father had known how to build a church also. On seeing the photograph, and having the dimensions explained to him, he said that he had not tried his hand at anything so big yet, although he should much like to do so. He was evidently proud of his own churches, and said that if he had not happened to be an Emperor

he would have liked to have been an architect, and wondered that Bentley had not followed in his father's footsteps. Bentley, with visions of the few months he had spent in an office with a drawing-board before him, replied that if he had had his choice he would rather have been an Emperor, and Menelek smiled and sighed, and said that people never knew what was good for them.

Not satisfied with showing his churches, he insisted upon taking Bentley to church with him one day, to attend a Coptic service, which lasted a little over four hours. There was much incense-burning and a species of dancing, and praying out loud, and as the service progressed the crowd got hotter and hotter over its devotions, and the atmosphere more and more stifling. Menelek was very anxious to know from time to time how the service impressed his guest, and perhaps it is better not to inquire into the truth of the answers given.

At last the interminable service was over, and Bentley filled his lungs with the sultry air outside, which felt like drinking champagne.

The next morning Menelek had his first driving lesson, and, as arranged, Bentley picked up Mr. Hohler to attend it.

There was some difficulty in tucking the Emperor's voluminous robes out of the way, now that serious business was contemplated, and the "jemimas" were not first-rate footgear for pedal work; but eventually they were ready to make a start, and

Menelek got into first speed all right and started, rather wobbling about at first; but he soon learned how to keep the nose of the car straight, and proceeded to follow the tracks made by the car on its arrival.

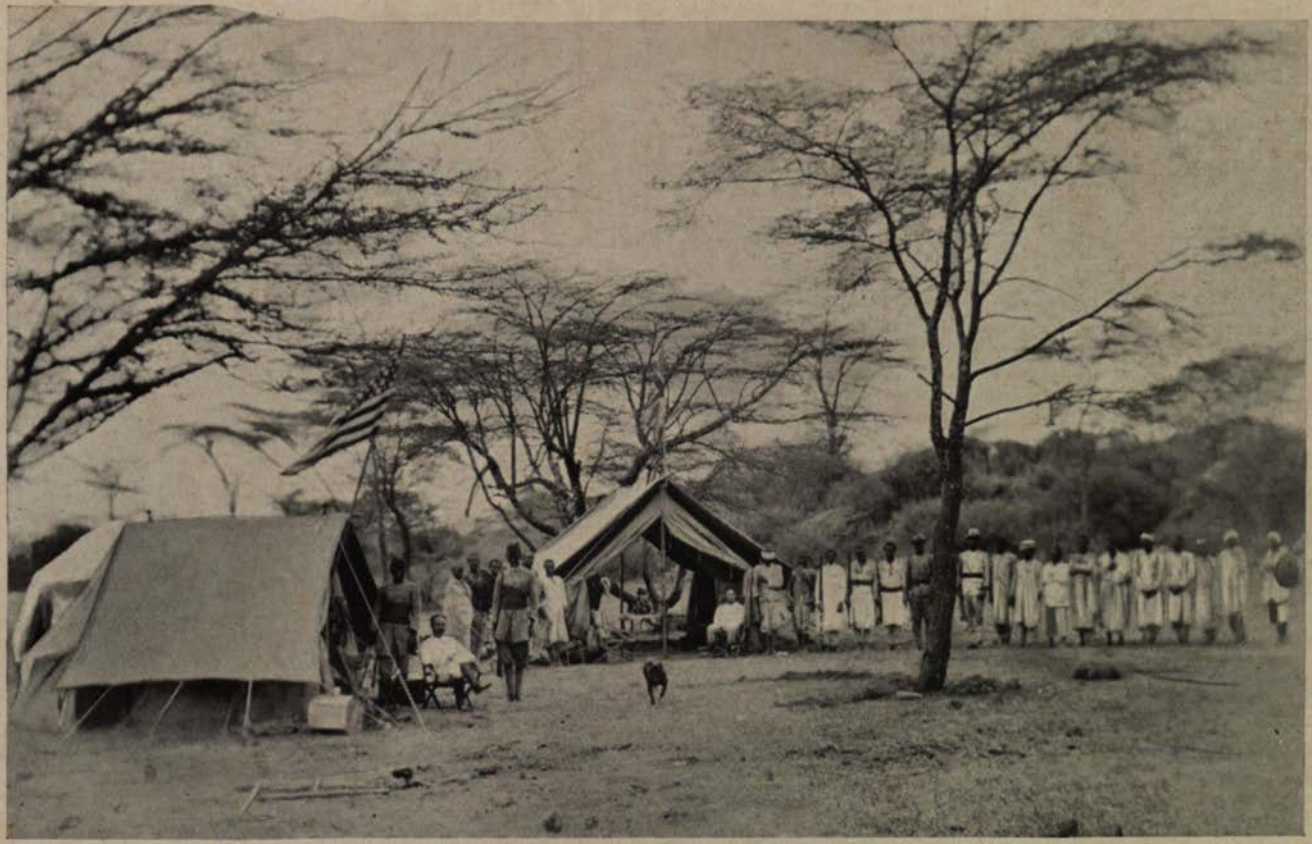
Soon Mr. Hohler was induced to make a remark, eulogizing the accuracy with which the Imperial chauffeur was following the tracks, when Menelek said at once in Amheric: "It is forbidden to speak to the man at the wheel." Where he got the remark from he did not explain.

By the time they had been gone about an hour he had gained confidence and tried second speed, well throttled down. As with all beginners, his first aim was to learn how to stop the car. As soon as he thoroughly understood the action of the throttle and brake, he applied them both together, with the result of stopping the car effectually. This pleased him rather, and he did it once or twice more, so Wells had plenty of practice at restarting the engine.

When eventually they returned to the Palace, he put on all the speed he dared, and drove up in style before an admiring, jabbering and shuffling crowd.

Every morning after that the Emperor drove himself for a time, and it was only when going long journeys that he sat in the back.

He soon grew to be fairly expert, and, indeed, the driving presented few difficulties, for the roads were excellent and always kept absolutely clear,



THE RETURN JOURNEY.

My caravan meets that of the American Commissioner on the banks of the Hawash River. My tent flies the Union Jack and U.S.A. Minister the Stars and Stripes.

My tent on the Hawash River—return journey

so there was never any traffic to dodge or the likelihood of any collision.

Edalji, the Parsee, was also progressing under Wells' fostering care, and the Englishmen began to see the time approaching when they would be able to depart.

Menelek continued as friendly as ever, and took Bentley as his honoured guest to the luncheon-party in the Guebi. The Guebi is a huge barn-like erection, and its size may be judged from the fact that it is capable of accommodating eight to ten thousand people comfortably.

The Emperor sat on a throne, raised on luxuriously carpeted steps under a huge canopy, and a rich chair was placed for Bentley, who was served with cooked meat in deference to his European tastes.

The rest of the company ate their meat raw, and sat on the floor in rows to do so. In the front ranks were the notables, generals, judges, and Ras's and priests, and as the distance from the throne increased, so did the importance of the occupants of the rows diminish. Judging by the distance of the last rows they must have been very small beer indeed.

The atmosphere, in spite of the size of the building, was not conducive to much appetite, and Bentley was as glad when the feast was over as he had been when the Coptic service came to an end.

He was beginning to feel that much more praying and feasting would finish off what the hardships of their journey had failed to do.

They remained in the capital three weeks, enjoying the hospitality of the various legations in the spare time that the Emperor allowed.

Whatever may be the political differences of the various representatives of the Powers, nothing of this showed itself to mar the friendliness of their social intercourse, and Bentley was made welcome and feasted wherever he went.

Meanwhile, he was secretly making preparations for his home journey, when he was suddenly struck down by illness, and was almost immediately at death's door, although Menelek sent his own doctor, and he was attended also by the doctor attached to the British Legation.

His case was diagnosed as complications set up by the same wound that had driven him home to England for the rest, which he had changed into the most arduous journey he had ever attempted. The hardships they had undergone, coupled with the nauseous food they had been forced to swallow, together with the continual muscular straining, had brought on inflammation and fever that defied all the skill of his attendants.

He lay there for over a fortnight, raving in delirium for the most part. Wells sat by his bed constantly, and Bully was inconsolable, and never left the room during the whole time, except to take a weary walk round the compound in company with Wells morning and evening.

Things went from bad to worse, until at length

Mr. Hohler, who was also most attentive, was forced to speak to Wells about arrangements for his going home alone, for it seemed hopeless that Bentley could recover.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, however, he took a turn for the better, and began to grow well again almost as speedily as he had fallen ill.

It was now Bully's turn. Whether it was the result of hardship and starvation, followed by a life of ease and plenty; or whether it was fretting over his friend's parlous state, or both combined, poor Bully began to waste away, and as Bentley got better, he got worse.

He had contrived to make friends with everyone, and the doctors attended him as assiduously as they had attended Bentley, and Bully was grateful, but resigned.

When Bentley was at length able to sit up, Bully could scarcely crawl; but he was delighted to see Bentley stronger, and could appreciate a joke as well as ever. Indeed, his happiness at seeing Bentley about again made him perk up a bit, and at last take some food of his own accord. Hitherto Wells had been obliged to feed him with a spoon like a baby. He slowly began to get better; but Bentley was ready to start for home before he was; and as they did not wish to be caught in the rains, as they infallibly must be if they delayed their departure much longer, they set to work with a will at their preparations.

Bully was still too feeble to walk, and so Wells

constructed for him a most commodious sort of palanquin, which could be strapped on to a mule, with a fine awning over it that almost vied with Menelek's umbrella in size.

George had been able to secure the services of six Somalis, and Bentley consequently reduced the number of his Abyssinians to six also, intending to leave them behind at the first sign of trouble with the Somalis. He proposed to do such shooting as they had time for in Abyssinia, and Menelek extended his permit to elephants.

Wells had kept in first-class health ever since reaching the capital, and he looked forward to the return journey with great excitement, for Bentley's heavy rifles had arrived, and he had vivid recollections of the chances which they had been forced to deny themselves when coming up with the car.

CHAPTER XIX

Good-bye to the Emperor—The journey to the coast—Sport—The rainy season—They reach the coast—Bully gets worse on voyage to Aden——Death of Bully—The End.

THEY formally handed the car over to the keeping of Edalji, the Parsee, in the sumptuous garage that Menelek had erected at the back of the Palace. They left with him all their tools, and as much knowledge as is possessed by the average chauffeur. Fresh tyres were on their way, and also a multiplicity of spare parts. There were a good many European engineers about the place, and they had no doubt that Edalji, if he found himself in a fix, would find someone to get him out of it.

Menelek was frankly sorry to lose them, and would gladly have induced Bentley to prolong his stay. He gave him many more presents at his final interview, and said that he had sent instructions all along the route to say that it was his wish that they should have as good sport as possible.

After a round of farewell dinners at the various legations they finally set off.

It does not come within the scope of this book to describe their journey to the coast, further than to

say that they had a month of excellent sport before arriving at Diredawa.

Wells achieved his heart's desire and shot a lion, which made up for the lost one on the upward journey. They got two rhinoceros, three very fine kudu heads, oryx and water-buck, and lost a good deal of time in trying to round up some elephants, but never succeeded in getting a shot. Needless to say, they gave the Bilen desert the widest berth possible, and although they met Danakils, they were of the camel-driving variety, and never in sufficient quantity to be at all dangerous.

Bully bore the journey well, and was immensely proud of his palanquin. He was still weak, and did not attempt to follow any of the shooting and tracking operations, but was content to remain in camp with George. The hunters were always sure of a warm welcome when they struck the camp again, and Bully was immensely interested in each fresh trophy that was brought in.

They reached Diredawa just as the rains were beginning, so that effectually put a stop to any idea of further shooting towards the coast.

At Diredawa they were warmly welcomed by the Governor, Atto Negato, Mr. Michœledis and Mr. Vorperian, who was again in Diredawa when they arrived. Here they had the melancholy satisfaction of being visited by many relatives of the unfortunate boys who had lost their lives in the Bilen desert. The greater part of these sorrowing bereaved ones

The result of shooting and trading

The breaking-up of the Expedition at Diredawa, on the return journey. The last camp

proved, on investigation made by Atto Negato, to be the rankest frauds on the look-out for baksheesh. Bentley put a certain sum of money into that gentleman's hands to be paid in compensation to any just claimants that might be found, and after that, directed any further mourners to the Palace, where they would be attended to. It was wonderful how few found their way there, although the Palace was in reality only a very few steps down the street from the hotel.

They found many English papers waiting for them, with accounts of their trip almost complete; and over two months' letters, for they had stopped any forwarding to the capital some time before they left. Having seen to the proper packing of their trophies, and addressed the first pair of kudu horns shot to Messrs. Burberry in the Haymarket, in satisfaction of a long-made promise, on whose premises they may still be seen, they eventually followed their goods by train to Djibouti, where they arrived, to the Governor's astonishment, none the worse for their trip after all. They secured passages to Aden, and George decided to go with them, at any rate, as far as that.

Bentley was in hopes that the sea-trip would pull Bully round, for he was still very weak, and they made special arrangements for his comfort on the voyage; but poor Bully grew gradually worse and had finally to be carried ashore.

They let two ships go past, in order to nurse him,

and one of them sat with him constantly; but Bully had made his last voyage, and finally died, looking lovingly into their eyes, with a paw in the hand of each.

They buried him themselves and erected a nice monument over his grave, with a suitable epitaph; but the best epitaph lies in the fact that after all these years two fairly hard-grained men can never speak of him without tears coming into their eyes.

THE END

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